

# SOUTHERLY

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## JOHN ALEXANDER ROSS McKELLAR

Few early losses have been so much deplored by lovers of poetry in Australia as that of J. A. R. McKellar, who was twenty-seven when, in 1932, he died after a short illness. That year he had published, as the first of the Jacaranda Tree Books of Australian Verse edited by Kenneth Slessor and produced by Frank Johnson, *Twenty-Six*, so-called because "These verse exercises are twenty-six in number, and were written before I was twenty-six years old." He left a short verse play, "The Ribbon and the Rose", and a number of incomplete or unrevised poems, from which, at the instigation of Mr Hugh McCrae, who as Editor of the *New Triad* had encouraged McKellar, a selection is here printed. Mr J. W. Gibbes, Classics Master at Canterbury Boys' High School, friend and guide to McKellar and recipient of the dedication of *Twenty-Six*, has kindly supplied a memoir to introduce the selection. With the exception of "The Gleaming Cohort" and "Newts", all the pieces mentioned by Mr Gibbes are included, though only the two relevant sections of "Teams" can be given. The Editor had already selected some of these poems, wholly or in part, and others which are here added.

Miss M. McKellar and Mr A. R. McKellar, the poet's sister and brother, have placed the manuscripts at our disposal and have also assisted in every other possible way. Our thanks are tendered to them.

## MEMOIR

By J. W. GIBBES

It was in 1919 that I first met McKellar, when I joined the staff of the Sydney High School, where he was then a pupil in his Leaving Certificate year. As he did not study Latin or Greek, he was not a member of any of my classes, and it was not until October of that year, when I took over the First XI, that I came into direct contact with him. It is as a cricketer that I chiefly remember him at this period. Tall and slight—he was then about six feet in height and weighed well under eleven stone—he played the game with rare gusto; a glorious outfield and absolutely tireless, he came into the pavilion after fielding while one of his opponents scored 400, as cheerful and jolly as an ordinary man who has just scored a century. As a batsman he drove beautifully and was very skilful in getting over a rising ball.

Though his reputation for ability stood high in the school, our conversation at this time was mainly limited to sporting topics, and I was less impressed by his intellectual powers than by the charm of his smile and the attraction of his personality.

Of his literary efforts during this period I remember only a very clever imitation of Pepys which was published in the November issue of the *Record*.

From the end of 1919, when he entered the service of the Bank of New South Wales, till the middle of 1924, I lost touch with him completely. Then one Saturday night, returning from a School football match, I met him in the city and resumed an intimacy which was never broken till his death.

The following week-end he came to see me, bringing several pieces of his work in verse and prose. Some of these he preserved: "Anadyomene", "Invocation", "The Gleaming Cohort" and "Newts".

In criticizing these I was evidently more severe than I had intended to be, and it is no small tribute to McKellar's intellectual honesty and superb poise that it was not till after his death, when I saw "Teams", that I knew that I had given him pain. These verses were written nearly a year later after Sydney High School had sustained a bad defeat on the football field at the hands of the King's School, to the bitter disappointment of our few supporters.

At this time it had become obvious that Sydney High School must place a crew on the river or cease to be a member of the Athletic Association of Great Public Schools. As sports master I had made certain arrangements with the Glebe Rowing Club and was casting about for ways and means of raising funds. McKellar threw himself heart and soul into the business, and, with Arch Harvey and Ross Gollan, who had been his contemporaries at school, raised between £80 and £100 in a few months.

Further, he and Arch went into camp with the boys during the years 1924 and 1925, and by the discipline which they maintained were entitled to much of the credit for the school's successes in those years. McKellar, too, studied rowing with characteristic thoroughness and was soon as good a judge of a crew as of a roundel.

Meanwhile he came to see me every week-end and in the intervals of backyard cricket—he would have played cricket in the snow with a broom and a rag ball—we discussed books.

At this time when he was mastering the science of banking in a manner unrivalled by his contemporaries and was devoting so much of his time to the interests of his old school, he was reading very widely not only in English but also in French. Of the latter language he

had attained a mastery truly remarkable in view of the fact that all he had to build on was a four years' school course.

He had read the complete works of Anatole France, the plays of Molière, Régnier, the *Romans*, *Satires* and *Epîtres* of Voltaire, much of Ronsard, Malherbe and Rousseau, the *Essais* of Montaigne, the *Maximes* of la Rochefoucauld, the *Lettres persanes* of Montesquieu, the *Mémoires* of Brantôme, de Grammont and innumerable others, the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, the *Dizain des Reines*, the *Contes Drolatiques* of Balzac, the works of Rabelais, the *Fables* of la Fontaine, the short stories of de Maupassant and Catulle Mendès, the *Prince* of Machiavelli and the *Decameron*.

Anatole France he always valued highly; de Maupassant he regarded as the greatest of all short story writers; Voltaire he rated above Swift on the ground that he had more humanity, adding: "You can tell that the French belong to an older civilisation than the English if only because they regard sex as a joke. The Frenchman takes sex as he takes his wine with a gay laugh whether he needs a drink or he likes his company. The Englishman is either a drunkard vomiting in the street or a secret tippler ashamed of his vice or an adulterator of good liquor with the lemonade of false sentimentality."

Of Machiavelli he remarked that the principles of the *Prince* had so long been adopted in official circles as to seem rather trite.

In English at the same time he read Middleton, Webster, Kydd, Beaumont and Fletcher, Swift, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Crashaw, Marvell and Landor.

I can well remember his delight when he acquired the complete works of Fielding and brought the prize to show me.

He regarded *Amelia* as the greatest of English novels, but, like myself, found the occasional papers of Swift and Fielding more entertaining than their more imposing and better known works.

For Smollett he had a great admiration and was hence inclined to depreciate Dickens as a feeble follower. Andrew Marvell he regarded as one of the great and neglected glories of English literature. Contemporary writers also came in for their share of attention: Galsworthy, whose *Forsyte Saga* he rated high, Ford Madox Ford, Mottram, Montague, Cabell.

The last influenced him considerably, not merely in the stressing of the Helen motif which is obvious in much of McKellar's verse, but also in his conception of the principles of creative art. I shall never forget the joy with which we both welcomed *Beyond Life*.

Flecker and Dowson were read and put aside as damned of gods and men, but Housman was destined to be a lasting influence, as

## SOUTHERLY

much from a similarity of outlook as from his classic clarity and purity of expression.

It was during this period that McKellar gained his first knowledge of Greek and Latin authors through translations—a verse rendering of selections from the Greek Anthology, Apuleius in English, Petronius in French. He was much amused at the unacknowledged indebtedness of Anatole France and Boccaccio to Apuleius, while his knowledge of the Greek Anthology enabled him to form a juster estimate of the merits of Herrick than is usual even among professed students of that gay cleric's work.

McKellar was always fond of children and during these three years he did more for mine than I was able to do myself. He introduced them to Kipling (verse and prose), to Dickens and to Thackeray, buying them books and reading to them, and in the case of my then youngest child, a little invalid boy, buying him toys and teaching him to play with them. The verses headed "Nine" were written on the occasion of this boy's death.

At the beginning of 1927 I was transferred to Newcastle, "a town of monumental meanness", as McKellar was later to describe it. Two or three times a term, however, he came up to see me, and one week-end early in 1928 he arrived bringing a bundle of manuscripts and two bottles of sherry. It was 6 a.m. before we had disposed of both, and even at that depressing hour I was able to appreciate the merit of the verse and the extraordinary increase in power and technical skill. His reply was: "Keep them a week and write to me. It may be the sherry."

It was not, and my judgment was confirmed by the appearance of the pieces in the *New Triad*.<sup>\*</sup> This led to his making the acquaintance of Hugh McCrae and Ernest Watt, the latter of whom was then financing the periodical, and McKellar began to entertain hopes that he had found an assured medium for the publication of his work, hopes which were soon dashed when the paper itself ceased to appear.

Of the other verse contained in this manuscript little need be said here, as it was nearly all included in *Twenty-Six*. I remember, however, that, in reply to my promised letter in which I had selected the concluding stanzas of "Marengo Comes to Market" for special commendation, he wrote:

We scorn deception.

"The troubles of our frail and angry dust  
Are from eternity and will not fail.

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<sup>\*</sup> "Warring", April 1; "A Counterblast to the Press from a Bank Teller", June 1; "The Horse", July 1, 1928.

Bear them we can; and, if we can, we must;  
Shoulder the sky, my lad, and drink your ale."

—HOUSMAN.

About this time he had again taken up cricket and football, playing the former with a Shire team and making an occasional 50, and playing football with Randwick. In his letters the best matches of the 1928-9 season figured as largely as literature, while Cyril Towers and Wally Meagher tended to eclipse Philip Guedalla and Liddell Hart.

Meanwhile he had become friendly with Noel Pearson, to whom he owed in great part a really sound understanding and appreciation of music. Of paintings and etchings he had already acquired considerable knowledge.

What most impressed me, however, was that he could speak the language of any man with equal facility and equal pleasure to himself, and could enjoy, for the time at least, the conversation of the coal-miner or the tramp as readily as that of the financial magnate or the scholar.

In 1929 he suffered a serious disappointment. He had sent some of his verses, including "Dawn Patrol",\* to Garvin of the *Observer*, but they were returned. As a set-off, he captained the Randwick Reserve Grade XV, which won the premiership. This was no mean performance, as he lacked the speed necessary for a loose forward and had not the weight and ruggedness of a real ruck man; but his courage, honesty and brains carried him further than many with superior physical gifts, and in the following year he was a regular member of the First Grade premiership side.

In October, 1929, he sent me a warning of the approaching financial stringency, as "the bottom has fallen out of wool".

It was then that I began to realise how high he stood in the service of the bank, for the fact that I knew McKellar so impressed bank managers twice his age that it was eighteen months before I felt the pinch.

He was steadily increasing his knowledge of Greek and Latin literature, reading Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Martial, Plautus, Terence, Tacitus, and Aristophanes in translations.

It was amazing to me that he was able to discern the literary merit of the poets in wretched renderings, but his perception was so keen that he could even realise that Catullus was lyrist when presented in bald prose. Much of Horace was bound to appeal to him for the same qualities that made him love Housman. He was fortunate in having Colman's translation of Terence and Plautus in the Loeb

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\* *Twenty-Six*, page 25: "Dawn—Camel Patrol Setting Out".

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edition. The latter he maintained was a literary ancestor of Chaucer.

He was proud of his Highland ancestry and delighted in genealogies. He strongly deprecated the suggestion that the proportion of Celtic blood in the Gael was negligible and, while applauding the clans who ruined themselves fighting for a lost cause, he expressed equal admiration for the Campbells who always chose the winning side.

This last, however, was only a polite gesture, congratulating a victorious opponent. He himself instinctively chose the weaker side and was born to fight for lost causes. This is the theme of the "Ribbon and the Rose", of "The Retreat from Heaven";\* and the attitude is explicitly stated in the last two stanzas of the "Address to the Deity".

Early in 1931 I returned to Sydney and stayed for some two months with McKellar and his mother and sister at Mosman. He was then reading Maurois's *Byron* and was delighted that the biographer attributed many of the poet's irregularities to his "wild Scotch blood". Another work which we then read and discussed was the satires of John Donne.

During the winter he was working tremendously hard at his profession, harder than any of us realised at the time, and was also actively assisting friends who found themselves in positions above their capacity, by placing his knowledge at their disposal, and those who found themselves in financial difficulties with his purse. He was also captain of the Northern Suburbs Reserve Grade XV and would attend practice once a week, going without his tea in order to do so. After training he would come to my house and eat a supper of fried eggs, after which he would drop off to sleep on a sofa, often waking about midnight to tell me the true causes and remedies of the "depression", as we then called it. "Free trade: close the picture shows and shoot the American Consul" was one panacea; and he expressed strong disapproval of a bank policy which had resulted in the financing of time payment purchases of motor-cars and musical instruments to the detriment of our pastoral and agricultural interests.

Later in the year he went to Melbourne for a couple of months, but he regarded this as an exile and was glad to return.

In January, 1932, the first day of the Australian Athletic Championships, *Twenty-Six* appeared.† He gave me my copy that night, his attitude manifesting, as Ross Gollan said, "excitement sternly controlled". I was as excited as he and far less controlled and was much touched by the dedication,‡ for, seeing how rapidly his

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\* *Twenty-Six*, page 48.

† Dated 1931.

‡ "To John Wilfrid Gibbes This tribute of Finance to Scholarship Supine."

powers were maturing, I had advised him not to publish for a couple of years and I knew nothing of the intended publication.

The word "supine" was a joke at my financial affairs which were slightly more muddled than usual, and he had described me more than once as a figure of scholarship lying on its back to conceal its bare backside.

Of the poems which did not appear in this book I rather regretted the exclusion of "Assonances", "April Memorial" and "Nineteenth Century Epitaph".

The Jacaranda series came to a premature end, but Slessor's work passed through McKellar's hands in manuscript as well as much else. Slessor's verse\* afforded us as much pleasure as the other stuff supplied amusement or disgust.

About this time McKellar wrote the "Ribbon and the Rose", where the influence of Cabell will be obvious to anyone who has read *Jurgen*, and he began the "Fourth Napoleon".

The plan of this last, which was to be a magnum opus, he described to me as follows: "The hero, a sergeant in the last war, deserts in Italy and through a revolution there rises to be a despot; conquers France, Spain and the whole Mediterranean littoral; then realising that power is but Dead Sea fruit he sinks deeper and deeper into sensuality and sadism till he is deposed and killed in a rebellion and dies friendless, but not before he has shown a flash of the old fire."

The conception of the man was suggested by many instances in history. He had read Plutarch and Suetonius; he had also read Baker's *Sulla*, and Sulla was always a favourite of mine. Consequently he had realised the effect of unlimited power on all men but the one who had the moral courage to let it go after he had grasped it. He had been impressed, too, by the passage in Cabell's *Figures of Earth* relating to Solomon and his wisdom.

The lines in "Fourth Napoleon" with which he himself was most pleased were Stanza III, 6:

Stung by an insect to the sweet assault,

Stanza VIII, 18 and 19:

That irritable race, begot by wind  
Upon the belly of futility,

Stanza IX, 21 to 24:

Not caring much if God is on his side  
Or if He shelters neutral in Monaco,  
But swearing that his soul is crucified  
If he be left without his own tobacco.

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\* *Cuckooz Contrey*, Number Two of the Jacaranda Books.

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At this time he remarked that decasyllabic verse was his medium, in that he was not tempted to write it unless he had something to say.

I have regarded this unfinished poem as not only giving the highest promise of achievement but also as containing his best lines, and I have always felt that, if completed, it would have been something of such genuine merit as to compel recognition.

It was, however, while he was still at work on it that he fell ill. It was a fortnight before I went to see him and found him in bed, reluctant to stay there, writing in pencil "Rare Print", which he finished and gave me to read before I left.

I returned home expecting that he would be up and about any day, but I never saw him alive again.

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## POEMS

### ANADYOMENE

I walk unaccompanied; but near the sea  
The restless tide 'turns in the heart of me,  
And where the gulls fly up with startled screech  
To make new flocks along the sea-ribbed beach,  
I lean across the waves, and wait—in vain.

Watching, I know there'll be no waterspout  
From bubbling dark-green deep-sea-wells thrown out,  
Alive with curious fish and flashing tails,  
Whence lo! the goddess wrapt in seven veils  
Of glistening foam floats upward to the sun.

I know 'tis vain, yet I still linger where  
The dazzling sun breaks through the sea-wet air,  
To watch her deep-sea-sunless-pallid breast  
Flush faintly rose, as with the sun caressed  
She wakes, and swims into the upper mist.

1923

### INVOCATION

Give me your leave to love  
Until my breath  
Arrests not at her step—  
Then, take me, Death.

1923

## THE STAGE IS SET

Stand on a moonless hill at dead of night  
 And overlook the restless tumbling seas,  
 Let there be all the stars in blaze, as white  
 As are the wind-turned leaves of poplar trees.  
 Look in the heaven's wheeling dome of dark,  
 And dawn on white waves misty in the gloom,  
 Let the chill wind strike, naked, bare, and stark;  
 Then gather from that air a thought of doom.

The broken cries on gods born of the sun,  
 The moon-mad invocations of the light,  
 Avail not underneath that starry wrack.  
 Nothing replies. There is no sound but one,  
 The tale of turning tides upon the bight,  
 Skirting the narrow beach and drawing back.

1923

## WEST

When we are dead, I do not think we live,  
 Save in a heaven touching close to earth,  
 Which holds no passion this life cannot give,  
 War certainly and love, mayhap, and birth;  
 Yet I would not think even this of death,  
 He is too sure an artist to deny  
 The ultimate oblivion, past breath—  
 When we have done, 'tis done, and still we lie.

Far better thus, inscrutable, unjust,  
 Than looking at the stars to see God's face,  
 When Victory leans not to love nor lust,  
 And the reward of running is the race,  
 Far better thus: unseen, in states unknown  
 To travel fast and travel far, alone.

## TEAMS

(*For John Wilfrid Gibbes*)

## I

Not by your voice, or hands, but in one look  
 I knew the time had come to close the book:  
 A silent minute—only Golly spoke,  
 Between his intermittent rings of smoke—  
 And it was just; the farce was done, at last.  
 —Then Archie broke his spiritual fast  
 To curse, and count the crocks among the team,  
 While I sat back beyond the fire's gleam,  
 Demolishing a half-dismantled dream.  
 For I had failed. I think I knew before  
 You read them through; but now, I had no more  
 Uncertainty, and it's a bitter thing  
 To have the heart but not the tongue to sing.  
 But—'Know thyself'—I did, a little more

## SOUTHERLY

—That apple always had a bitter core  
Ever since Eden. Through dim avenues  
Which Silence keeps, and never will refuse,  
Whoever knocks, he let me wander then,  
Away from voice and thought of other men,  
And for myself I felt great pity there,  
For I had dreamed so much, and dreams are fair—  
But suddenly a voice said: "Is it well,  
My son, in these dark avenues to dwell,  
Complaining because Fate has kept concealed  
The magic flute that is to few revealed?"  
—Old Silence, walking somewhere in my mind,  
Had cast me forth, and closed his gate behind;  
While, like a barge, mist-shrouded, on a stream,  
Vaguely your voices closed around "the team".  
—Then all at once, the dull resentment passed,  
I knew I had come home again, at last.

### III

Thus, for a winter's space returns to me  
The ardour of that one first loyalty.  
It's little of the world that I have seen  
In less than twenty years that I have been,  
But one by one fair things have dropped away,  
And left me, only poorer by a day,  
Until there's nothing more but still to live  
Indifferent to what the years may give  
And laugh at anything the mind can span,  
Mostly myself. . . .

Yet, if I wanted plan  
To build my days on, then I think I'd take  
Something that other men have failed to break:  
The little loyalties we learnt at school,  
Since I have not yet found a wider rule.

And so I come to thank you for the team  
As symbol I can always find a scheme  
Longer to live if nothing else avail—  
Or keep, at least, my mouth shut, if I fail.

### FRIENDS

O! I'll not want to be alive  
When all my friends are dead,  
For a man's heart dies the day they die,  
Kneels at his own death bed.  
None to receive—that's the end of giving.  
No one to come at call.  
O! I'm not wanting to be living  
With the last one under wall.

1924

## THE PRISONERS 1914-1924

Our brothers speak few words, who have come back;  
 They snarl, sometimes, like wounded beasts at bay,  
 But most they sit in darkness, whimpering,  
 Or grimly smiling answer: "Not that way",  
 Pointing a shaking finger whence they came.  
 They have such trembling hands, bleeding and bruised,  
 Their fingernails ripped off and bended back,  
 Broken and torn, as though they had been used  
 To scratch and tear at earth's unyielding stones,

Seeking a way, a passage from the pit—  
 And all the dead men have such broken hands,  
 But none can read the riddle of their bones.  
 Now they have died, and things are as they were,  
 All that was theirs is ours, and nothing more,  
 For they alone can tell, in those long years,  
 If their dead hands came ever on a door.

## READING IN BED

The evening falls, when I must lie alone,  
 And listen to the thin and ghostly tread  
 Of strangers in the house of flesh and bone.  
 Spies from the voiceless armies of the dead

I feel them touch their way along the walls  
 As from unconscious corridors they creep;  
 A sentinel remembers, starts, and falls;  
 So am I given to the hands of sleep.

## ADDRESS TO DEITY

I do not ask for crown or groat,  
 Though, if you have them, Lord,  
 Or wine or war or petticoat,  
 They may sit at my board.

Not length of days nor gifts of phrase  
 Nor the moon in Heaven, Lord,  
 But a steady hand when I go my ways  
 And end with a broken sword.

1926?

## ASSONANCES

Zeus was begot by Rhyme  
 Though his father's name was Time:  
 Let not Rhea censure claim,  
 Other wives have done the same:  
 Zeus, seeking assonances,  
 Leads the world some merry dances:

## SOUTHERLY

Let him taste a single grape,  
Straightaway he thinks of rape;  
Fathers on poor Amphitryon  
Hercules, prodigious scion;  
Gives to Danae a bath,  
Perseus the aftermath;  
Spartan Leda's pity begs,  
In a year she's laying eggs.

1926?

### RANK DESOLATION OF A PEN—

In truth, the boundaries of men  
Are such as of themselves be laid;  
At harvest-home is seed-time paid;  
And, as a man doth use his sight,  
So toucher<sup>d</sup> with magic is his night.

Who knows, on leaves, the dew-wet pearl  
Weaves him necklaces, to curl  
About Eleyne, her swan-white throat—

As lily flowers, gentle, float  
Across the bosom of a stream,  
So earth upbears frail things of dream.

Ere Dian's flowers on me were strewn  
I held the silver-hillocked moon.

### "I HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO THEE, CYNARA, IN MY FASHION"

What though my heart I counsel to be colder,  
And urge obedient senses to be wise,  
Sooner or late my hand must seek her shoulder,  
And mine mark out the orbit of her eyes.

Sooner or later lips must turn to others,  
Sooner or later brow must bend to breast.  
Mother of love, O Venus, mother of mothers,  
Slave to thy slave am I, with love oppressed!

Yet, as in honour bound I may not borrow  
The "Vicker's"\* rose-bud lies to charm the walls,  
Truth and relentless time bring in tomorrow  
And cry a truce before the city falls.

For I was born a Gael, thus bound to wander,  
Love pretty lips, and many press to mine,  
But all the while the ardent moment squander,  
To live a wasted hour in Auld Lang Syne.

So, though he bear blue bonnet and the feather,  
 Far from his native glen, and pebbled burn,  
 Firm is the clansman's foot upon the heather,  
 Sweet heather, where he never may return.

1926

\* Herrick.

## A NINETEENTH CENTURY EPITAPH

This was an Englishman. He was *not* great,  
 Nor, by the world's accounting, very wise,  
 No matter where it lay, a cricket bat  
 Was the unfailing lode-star for his eyes.  
 He could not rest, until, to try its weight,  
 He'd taken it, and made some airy stroke  
 Which followed through to nothing. After that,  
 As a young lover who returns to face  
 The world, from dangling on a silken cord,  
 His thoughts would linger in a greener place,  
 Although he talked in this. . . .

They say he broke

For ever with a mistress once, because,  
 When on his way to her, he chanced to pause  
 Beside a cricket field. He never could  
 Go by until he saw the next ball bowled.  
 She, I suppose, could not brook being told,  
 And it would not occur to him to lie.

I don't know where, or when, he came to die,  
 But men have told me it was oversea,  
 On some forgotten hillside. That may be.  
 War for its lack of reason soon atones  
 If bullets bring sufficient men to bones.

So there he rests for ever. Yet I dreamed  
 A parting that, for him, more fitting seemed:

He leaned upon a fence to watch a match.  
 While all the shadows lengthened on the grass  
 A stranger whispered words I could not catch  
 And beckoned him to follow. Slow to pass,  
 I heard him plead for "just another ball",  
 But Death was stern, and would not heed his call.

1927

## THE PILGRIMS OF THE PAST

The walls of Heaven are crumbled,  
 The troops of angels hushed,  
 The pride of man is humbled,  
 His secret hope is crushed;  
 Rewards and fairies vanished,  
 Belief he may not own;  
 From holy cities banished  
 His town is dust alone.

## SOUTHERLY

And since naught is before him  
But falling skies and black,  
Because a woman bore him  
He must be looking back  
On countries all unclouded;  
The pilgrim's view is clear;  
His longing has but shrouded  
The image with a tear.

Through old Virginny's cotton  
The Swannee Rivers run,  
While men who long were rotten  
Enjoy with him the sun.  
He sings the sweetest patches,  
And argues thence the tune,  
For memory so matches  
His crying with a moon.

He knows dead summers stronger  
With each receding sun,  
And as the list grows longer  
More often turns to one.  
And O, to have the power  
To watch the easy skill  
Of Trumper for an hour,  
And lie upon the hill.

1927

## BLACKWATTLE BAY

A timber ship unloaded  
Her cargo in the bay,  
Log linked to fellow convict log  
A floating forest lay.  
As idly I looked on them,  
The thought occurred to me  
That one of these in course of Time  
My coffin well might be.

1928

## IMPERFECTION

Lust in its shame and love in all its grace  
Are fixed in men upon the selfsame base,  
Nothing in life is perfect, fast and pure  
Beyond the reach of evil to endure.  
But is it reason on the fates to cry  
Because we fall to sickness and must die;  
Because we touch the heroes' feet of clay,  
Deny the rest, and wish the world away?

1928

## THE LANDS

*(Lands Department Building, Sydney, New South Wales)*

A sweet Franciscan of the Lands,  
 Sir Thomas Mitchell stares and stands  
 Indifferent to the gentle words  
 Of Bass, befriended of the birds  
 Who simulate the snows of time  
 By anointing him with lime,  
 Ere they depart to flutter thanks  
 In equal kind on Joseph Banks,  
 Or cloud with high foreboding dirt  
 The stony thoughts of Richard Sturt.

Brother Thomas looks all day  
 Past the Bank across the way  
 Thinking nothing of the sport  
 Weather makes with Sutcliffe Mort,  
 Realising none of these—  
 —Staring Bank and bronze and trees—  
 Occupied with dim designs  
 Of gouging out the triple lines  
 Of Torres Vedras' frowning face  
 In Bridge Street and Macquarie Place,  
 Or meditating, half in dream,  
 A bridge of boats across the stream  
 Men of flesh no longer see  
 Trickling listless to the Quay.

But truly, lady, passing by!  
 We are strangers, you and I,  
 In our world as much alone  
 As Thomas Mitchell made of stone,  
 And the images I raise  
 Of the country he surveys  
 Are no wider of the mark,  
 Not more hopelessly in dark,  
 Than our vision what is true,  
 Yours, of me, and mine, of you.

Pretty lady, when you smile,  
 Phantom thoughts awake and file  
 From the sunken funeral bed  
 Where the poppy long had shed  
 Her blind and drowsy seed.  
 For a passing moment freed,  
 Now assemble wistful wraiths  
 Of my long abandoned faiths:  
 So I pass in sad review  
 What I still might seem to you,  
 Leave the child that I began  
 And resume the present man;

## SOUTHERLY

Old beneath an ageless sky,  
Living, hopeless, soon to die.

Pretty lady, please to think  
Never past the moment's brink;  
Who can tell what you might see?  
Better leave the grave to me.  
While so warmly beats your heart,  
Kiss me, lady, and depart.

Thomas Mitchell, flesh and bone,  
Somewhere coffined and alone,  
If the worms that bring you air  
Your immortal spirit spare,  
Speak the answer that we crave . . .  
All is silence from the grave,  
Silence nothing can transmute  
To the tones of Heaven's flute,  
Echoes none can pause and tell  
As the sombre drums of Hell.

Thomas Mitchell, raised in stone,  
Image of once flesh and bone,  
Close your eyes that nothing see,  
Tumble down, give place to me,  
And the world that passes by  
Would not any change descry.

Long ago when I was young  
Pagan songs were made and sung.

1930 (*Unfinished*)

## APRIL MEMORIAL

Along the road and through the street,  
With bayonets gleaming in the heat,  
I saw the men who marched away  
As though it had been yesterday.

Despite the fall of year on year,  
The vision I remembered clear,  
But now before the column's head  
I caught the dusty glint of red,

And long in front a scarlet file  
Stretched for a weary Spanish mile,  
Until could now be plainly seen  
The Riflemen with jackets green.

Beside them marching four abreast,  
Battalions white and blue were dressed;

## SOUTHERLY

Over their faces, lean and hard,  
Towered the bearskins of the Guard,

While from their golden Eagles flew  
The standards red and white and blue.

Yet past the corporal's men I saw  
Defenders of an older law,  
And to a quick step light and gay  
On swung the men of Malplaquet.

Onward in endless line they went  
Until the road rose up and bent  
Over the hillside, where I knew  
Rank after rank of bowmen true,

Sword and pike and morning star,  
Covered the roadway, stretched as far.

It was the army of the past;  
A soldier first, a soldier last,  
Rank after rank, and wave on wave,  
The gift of glory to the grave.

For long I watched the line ahead,  
The blue and scarlet, brown and red;  
A shadow fell across my mind;  
I turned and cast my gaze behind:

Dressed in the old and gallant hue,  
A regiment swung into view;  
Clear in the sparkling April morn  
I saw the soldiers yet unborn.

The drumming ceased, the bugles died,  
All at once a woman cried,  
And where before each soldier stepped,  
A woman knelt, a woman wept.

The mighty weeping rose and fell,  
Honour-and-Glory's passing bell:  
The splendours of embattled years  
Accomplishing a woman's tears.

But suddenly throughout my mind  
The vision faded: I was blind,  
Then looked again. From sombre stone  
The last of withered wreaths had blown.

1930 (*Unrevised*)

## SOUTHERLY

### AFTERNOON, FIN DE SIECLE

Away, the sun leans downward from his noon,  
Bent lightly on the gently-breathing plain,  
Like some expectant lover, come too soon,  
Hovering above his mistress' counterpane,  
The while she sleeps; he seeks to touch her lips  
And tease the twin blue flowers in her eyes  
Awake at his caress, whilst fingertips  
Elsewhere engage in wanton enterprise.

### HELEN

Sing me no more the dark Egyptian queen,  
Slim-girdled as her Cairene dancing-girls,  
Or that Swan child whose father's plumes were seen,  
Made whiter still, in her twin nipped pearls.  
This Helen, mistress of a world's unrests,  
Even so beautiful, ere Time grew old  
Destiny bruised his brow against her breasts,  
Sing not—the dawn is gone, the day is cold.  
Sing them no more. They were a dream, at best.  
Yet even marching Time may not enlarge  
The changeless spirit, though renews the breast,  
And eyes still dazzle with the burnished barge.  
Dead—but the heart forgets them not, nor tires,  
Their lips are warm yet with unborn desires.

### VILLANELLE OF THE MELANCHOLY MINSTRELS

Still they sing in the olden way:  
"O, vanished dames were fairer far,  
The world was younger yesterday.

Gather ye roses while ye may,  
For time is swift as the falling star."  
Still they sing in the olden way:

"The wistful willows droop and sway,  
The sea breaks sadly on the bar,  
The world was younger yesterday.

Death is near, and the sky is grey.  
Our sail is set for lands afar."  
Still they sing in the olden way:

"Over the hills and far away."  
The lute is strung to the setting star.  
Still they sing in the olden way:  
"The world was younger yesterday."

### POVERTY, CHASTITY, OBEDIENCE

Although to strict monastic rule  
My action seems confined,

Since Beauty keeps me still at school  
 And Fortune is unkind,  
 And to a Bench I may not plea  
 For you'll not arbitrate,  
 Condemning me, untried, to be  
 Your own true celibate,  
 Yet a petition I present :  
 The vows are three, not four,  
 Perpetual silence was not meant,  
 I trust, to crush me more.

## FOURTH NAPOLEON

## I

Out of the stream the legions tread,  
 The mud resettles on the bed  
 Where Rubicon still flows—  
 Is the geranium more red,  
 And deeper is the rose?

## II

Caesar went south; straddled his narrow world  
 Like a Colossus; ran to death his foes,  
 Gave to the city law, and fell to dreams;  
 Languished in Egypt, stung by the serpent's tooth  
 And drowsy with Love's poison in his veins;  
 Returned to Rome, to get for recompense  
 A dagger in his heart—so passes all  
 The glory of this world, and he whose name  
 Hushed into whisper every human voice  
 Dwindles to summer dust, and is no more  
 Than a burnt ash, incapable of flame.

## III

He swayed the lives of men, and they may rule  
 A wife, a cat, a mistress, or a mule;  
 The wife, her child; the cat, nose-quivering mice;  
 The mice, their fleas; a flea, some sleepless fool  
 Who does his paramour the honour twice,  
 Stung by an insect to the sweet assault.  
 In sullen recognition of her fault  
 The heavy mistress fetches up in bed—  
 Caesar is born again, and in the malt  
 His father's boon companions wet his head.

## IV

Herod the King was in some mood like this  
 When he gave out that every child should die.  
 Had I a heart as nervous as was his  
 I would not dare to drink, undress, or lie  
 Two in a bed, with women made to kiss  
 And tell your secrets to, but like the priest  
 Of Nemi, who usurps the Golden Bough,

## SOUTHERLY

Stealthily through the forest I would creep,  
Ears at the prick, grown thin from want of sleep,  
Watching, for ever waiting, for the least  
Crackle of twig or unrelated sound  
To tell the trespass on my sacred ground  
Of the eternal murderer, come to wrest  
Life and the priestly mantle from my breast.  
Still, for the moment, children are all safe  
Within the lands I rule, and though perchance  
The lad who yet will oust me sucks in France  
Milk from his mother's dugs, I've yet to think  
That's any call to interrupt his drink.  
It is enough for me to recognise  
That Caesar rarely of declension dies;  
Lincoln was shot, and Mussolini went  
Into a more atomic firmament  
All in a second, fifteen years ago.  
Perhaps my doom comes in with supper wine  
Before tomorrow morning. Let it be.

### V

When Caesar looked within his glass,  
And saw that he must die,  
Of what tomorrow brings to pass  
He knew no more than I.

But thinking on where time bestowed  
In lovely dust, Cornelia dead,  
Leander (lost where Lethe flowed),  
Shivered, awoke, and went to bed.

### VI

But in despite of emperors, and kings,  
And tyranny, transmitted safely down  
(In a dull vesture, dressed as common weal  
To save the face of free men) till the clown  
Is left to draw his subjects from the air,  
And call for contribution on the wings  
That flutter round the very eaves of Heaven—  
Is there another feather on the bird,  
Has the dim lark a grace note that he flings  
Into the blue, which Adam had not heard?

### VII

Like an informed mechanic, I may yoke  
Horse into cart, bring stallion to the mare,  
But not for any word of mine, or wish  
Will the poor Jennet labour with a fish  
Or the dull mountain bring a mouse to air.

Who shall decide the seed time of the rose?  
Who shall declare the journey of the bee?

Who shall persuade the daffodils to close,  
And leave the sun to Herrick and to me?

Who shall awaken desire in the heart of the last of the swallows  
For the sun and the warmth and the blue of the lakes of the south  
Until the dilatory bird shakes out its feathers and follows?  
Certain am I but of this, that the word issues not from my mouth.  
Is it of use to be king, and order the going of ships  
Into the brow of the storm, and back to the breast of the shore  
When the colour has gone from the eyes, and the blood is dried up in the lips  
Of Ellen, and Ellen is dust, that will quicken to flesh no more?

## VIII

Now I am fourth Napoleon, made by chance,  
Blessed by a Pope, and Emperor of France;  
At my direction, all the eagles feed  
Which are in Italy; and even Rome  
Welcomes me, with discretion, back to home;  
The West is mine, from Baltic Sea to Black,  
Beside whose margin it was once decreed,  
(As I may order now) the amorous poet  
Should sleep the Summer seasons on his back  
And so restore a Roman constitution. . . .

But why should my Imperial decree  
Remove the slim flanks of virginity  
Beyond the reach of any fumbling hand  
That seeks fee simple in the promised land,  
And, having plucked a not unquestioned rose,  
Rhymes the event in even looser prose?

I will have need of poets, soon or late . . .  
That irritable race, begot by wind  
Upon the belly of futility,  
Prone to deal hardly with the dust of kings  
If they are safely dead and celebrate  
The stopping of a hole with Caesar's clay,  
Quick to reject all flesh of baser worth  
In the deep lust of levelling to earth  
Colossus, for the dogs to have their day  
And lift their legs upon. . . .

But I'm alive,  
Still with a little power of life and death,  
A finger that can lift and stop the breath  
In the most lyrical of throats. So thrive  
The ballad-mongers in the market-place,  
Printing a legend round my smallest act,  
Swelling into a fiction every fact  
That makes me what I am, or would appear:  
The goose's quill is mightier than the sword  
If this be—not uncomfortably near,  
Naked and sharp—but sheathed and ringed with dust. . . .

## SOUTHERLY

Yet I will need my poets when I'm old  
To work upon decaying mind, convince  
The veteran who fought at Fontainebleau,  
The man who rose from private to be prince,  
The sergeant-major who, with iron hold  
Upon the throat of revolution, shook  
The apple that was Paris to the ground,  
The Emperor, who having made a Pope,  
Gave him a flock submissive, filled with hope  
Of everlasting life in Christian dress  
(Laggard in their observance, more or less,  
After an interregnum, whence the throne  
Of God had been vacated several years,  
But quick to give Jehovah back His own  
When to His more authentic hopes and fears  
We lent our humble voice by proclamation),  
Convince the man, who, having done these things,  
Sits in this chair and contemplates the past,  
That all has not been futile, and the wings  
Of Victory have fluttered not at last  
Beyond the lamp of action to the void,  
And the eternal darkness of achievement.  
I'll not dispute that Alexander sighed  
For other worlds to conquer, knelt and cried  
At Anaxarchus' feet (not having one  
Completely in his hold); but grant it done  
And all the stars of Heaven so subdued  
Before the Sun of Macedon, then he  
Must sigh for Asias of Infinity,  
And into Bacchic lethargy needs sink  
Lest for a moment he should stop to think,  
And on the walls of Ether break his sword.

But I must rouse. . . . So much has been achieved,  
For Homers of the day to celebrate,  
That all their little odes must be believed  
Which make of me the instrument of Fate  
And ultimately doubtless will proclaim  
My visits to a house of evil fame  
As factors incubating policy.  
I wonder, now, which first impulsive act  
Will be acclaimed the great deciding fact  
To bring me to the throne. . . . A few will touch  
The day I slipped from Lindenberger's clutch,  
And split his strength at Coblenz and Cologne;  
Some will, of course, go further back until  
I bend Geneva's council to my will,  
And in the streets of Avignon begin  
To mobilise the army of Turin;  
The Gauls among them almost to a man,

Will place the day when Fontainebleau began  
 And Paris knew she had another master,  
 So with a haste unseemly, turned, and made  
 An arch triumphal of the barricade,  
 Blowing a nervous kiss to turn disaster;  
 Others, more reckless (after I am dead)  
 Shall name the night my father turned in bed,  
 Resuming conversation . . . after pause;  
 More will discover mine is highland blood;  
 And one, more fond of logic than the rest,  
 Piling effect on cause, and cause on cause,  
 Will reach at length the all-pervading mud,  
 From which deposit he, deducing Flood,  
 Will pitch the Ark, and ultimately lose  
 His argument in Neolithic ooze.

Yet there is none among them who will trace  
 The worm of discontent which rots the core  
 Of this Imperial apple; none will know  
 The day, the place I struck the fatal blow  
 That sunders me from my Australian shore.  
 Ten, it is twenty years since we put out  
 Between the Heads, and several, rich in mind,  
 The wisdom of the war began to doubt  
 In thinking of the girl they left behind;  
 And I was one that landed at Marseilles,  
 On Genoa descended from the sea,  
 Saw the assault on Pisa droop and fail,  
 And spent a dirty summer guarding rail,  
 A Sergeant-Major of the Infantry,  
 Jaunty (with wholly non-commissioned pride  
 That would not for a Marshal stand aside  
 And quelled a tavern nightly . . . till it sunk  
 Submerged in wine, and I was truly drunk),

Roused from a stupor, stumbling blindly home,  
 Supported on a comrade's reeling shoulder,  
 He on the road to London, I for Rome,  
 While the moon faded, and the air grew colder,  
 Falling to curse, and standing up to swear!  
 He in a burst of sudden anger striking,  
 I with a tunic torn and shoulder bare  
 Throwing him rather harder than his liking,  
 He in his madness dragging from its sheath  
 The bayonet, for both of us to grapple  
 Until a random thrust from underneath  
 Slits up his throat below the Adam's apple. . . .

So in a moment I have killed a friend,  
 Cut every tie that binds me to the past,  
 Abandoned love, to journey to the end,  
 And reach the throne of Loneliness at last.

## SOUTHERLY

One letter came, I tore it up unopened,  
On the Ligurian bosom cast another. . . .  
The vows of love are better left unsaid  
When for a token you have killed her brother.

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba  
That I should weep for her? I must suppose  
She too has gone a journey with the rose,  
And withered into marriage, slept, and sinned  
Against my memory, as marital task,  
Or else, without the bond, as act of grace,  
All unrecorded in her pretty face,  
Discretion's latest triumph in the mask.

But love, for all that he's a boy, fights on  
And in my breast some retrospective hope  
Ponders the ruins ever and anon,  
And recreates a City, built on this;  
The fragrance of a flower and a kiss,  
The softness of a throat, and two brown eyes. .  
Then for a space I am no longer wise,  
Bid her not dead, her sleeping brother rise,  
Embark with me the ship that left for home  
When England's and the Empire troops withdrew  
In virtue of the three months' Peace of Rome.  
Again I see that immemorial blue—  
Which men call Sydney Harbour, and the Gods,  
Withheld until belief in them had died  
As earnest that if weary Homer nods  
Historians should not conclude he lied.

And so, with ardent wooing, am I come  
Before the altar, then to double bed,  
Deaf to the trumpet, hearing not the drum,  
Remembering perhaps, on Friday nights  
When veterans of war discuss their ale,  
The heightened glory of a hundred fights,  
The rioting, the jests that will not fail  
And every now and then the luckless dead;  
Until the recollection of a wife  
Brings me, through unbought butter, back to life.

### IX

Love in a cottage; candles in the dark  
Of loneliness, a child to clasp the knee,  
Three meals a day . . . O, undiscerning clerk,  
Who ever voiced the wish to change with me?

What can I show commensurate with his  
Freedom in bondage? All his life is ruled  
From this day till tomorrow until that  
Falls on the Friday of his funeral.

## SOUTHERLY

Bread to be won, and, being won, be eaten;  
Clothes to be bought, and being purchased, worn;  
Children to get, and being got, be beaten;  
Lips to be kissed, and being kissed, forsworn. . . .

Let him but look, and he can find direction,  
And grumbling through his life he onward goes  
Convinced that he has not made the best selection  
But satisfied as long as someone knows.

So will he stand him in a frozen trench,  
Knee-deep in water, thimble-deep in rum,  
Fighting Italians this year, next year French,  
Content provided that his orders come,

Not caring much if God is on his side  
Or if He shelters neutral in Monaco,  
But swearing that his soul is crucified  
If he be left without his own tobacco;

So will he perch him on an office stool  
And cast up lines of figures into years  
Content if someone checks his double rule  
And buoys his heart with those mysterious fears

Of his employers' private conversation  
Which the absorption of a little beer  
Transmutes into a righteous indignation  
Finding expression there but never here.

And so the least-born citizen of all  
Goes onward with the firmness of the great,  
Serene that should, by chance, the heavens fall  
Someone will tell him how to put it straight.

*1931-1932 (Incomplete and unrevised)*

### RARE PRINT\*

Mezzotint—artist unknown;  
Date—about seventeen-thirty;  
Foxed; somewhat rusty in tone;  
The margins deplorably dirty;

Subject—the death of a King,  
Limned with meticulous care.  
From his lively view of the thing  
One would think that the artist was there.

Commissioned, no doubt, to be hung  
Overhead young Oxonian blades  
When Jacobite ballads were sung  
In their City of beautiful shades.

## SOUTHERLY

See how he draws in for truth  
A mischievous boy with his dog,  
And the venturesome hand of a youth  
Who fondles the breasts of his Mog.

Perhaps these were never baptized  
In Anglican order and station  
But sprang from that parish capsized,  
Unsanctified imagination.

Yet we must grant them a soul  
To swear to a fact with conviction,  
Faith dare not fail to enroll  
The witnesses of Crucifixion.

For as the quick centuries pass  
In confusion of monarchs and numbers,  
While tombstones grow into the grass  
And garrulous Memory slumbers,

Prints of the time will be rare,  
And at figures commensurate priced:  
Hindu wits will debate debonair  
Whether Charles be not Peter or Christ

Engraved by a Dutchman in dress  
That accords with his own country fashion.  
Blind faith fumbling out to express  
The naïveté of its passion.

But the boy and the dog and the rascal,  
The girl, will be more than content  
Though they do not know Charles from Pascal,  
Sexagesima from Lent

To stand with recorded existence  
Within some antiquary's brain—  
True dead have no better resistance  
To nothing, and protest is vain.

And when the Archangel of Mildew  
Shall dampen them out from the eye  
I trust him to honour extinction  
With the pale mezzotint of a sigh.

*Feb.-March 1932 (Unrevised)*

\* Written on death bed. Print, of course, non-existent.

## INTERLUDE

## THE RIBBON AND THE ROSE

*A Fantastic Play in Verse*

## THE PROLOGUE

*Spoken by a young man in a careless manner; he smokes a cigarette, his dress is modern, but his enunciation is clear and sharp. He appears before the curtain.*

I speak the Prologue, and I hope to find  
A lodging in the mansions of your mind  
For the poor creatures, made of words, and hollow,  
Who in my footsteps presently will follow.  
Vent, if you wish, displeasure on my head.  
I live, and care not: they, alas, are dead,  
And may not care, but yet, who knows, your praise  
Might breathe a restless stirring in their days,  
And shades regret the shadows once they cast,  
As dead leaves rustle, though the wind has passed.  
So praise or damn. . . .

*[The speaker goes to move off the stage, then returns.*

But hold, I quite forgot,  
My mission was to tell you what is not,  
As well as that which is upon our stage.  
Pay not your pennies for a printed page  
Of names and nonsense. Give but half an ear  
From neighbours' scandal, and I'll make it clear.

Conceive that in the country of the dead,  
That bourn to which all travellers are sped,  
They journey on for ever in the state  
Maintained by them, when Death, exclaiming "Mate!",  
Rose from the table, leaving them to find  
Whichever way they moved, that way was blind.

*[He walks off slowly.*

I'll leave you now, I've other fish to fry.

*[In tones of surprise.*

Me stop to see the show? Not I!

*[Casually, almost in the wings.*

Yet if, in all things else, my prologue fails,  
'Twill point the moral of adorning tales.

## THE CURTAIN RISES

SCENE. *The interior of an inn in the country of the Dead. The room is lit by oil lamps in the fashion of antiquity. A door in the left front. Another at right rear. A fire burns in the right front. There are two chairs round it, and a mirror on the wall next to it. A table in the centre of the room, with a couple of old-fashioned chairs. Behind this a stairway leads from the room to a landing*

## SOUTHERLY

which gives to left and right on a number of rooms, and makes a balcony which overlooks the scene. The stage is deserted.

A rumble of wheels is heard, and the clip-clop-clop of horses' hoofs. Then a knocking at the left door. Enters from the right an old man with a lamp, carrying jangling keys in his hand. He is dressed in a loose white robe, and is a counterpart of Charon. He grumbles as he crosses the room.

HOST OF THE KEYS. Is all the world a traveller tonight?

[The knocking continues.

Confound the noise they're making.

[He reaches the door and unbars it.

Yes, all right,

I can't be quicker.

[The door opens inwards.

You are welcome, sir.

[He ceases grumbling and washes his hands in greeting.

A sorry night it is for men to stir

Abroad: but come, be seated at the fire

And we will wait upon your least desire.

[An OLD MAN, of a dingy appearance, enters, followed by a disreputable looking man-servant. He takes his black cloak from his shoulders, and gives it to the man, and he is seen dressed in a very dilapidated costume of a gentleman of the eighteenth century. His linen and lace are dirty. His ruffles are greasy, and his jacket stained with food and wine. In his hat is pinned a withered white rose. He removes his hat, and shuffles forward and sits by the fire, and puts out his hands to the blaze. His fingers are long and thin, and bony, his face brown and lined, he has a scanty grey beard.

OLD MAN. See to the carriage, Thomas.

[The servant goes out the right door. He turns to the HOST OF THE KEYS, who listens, then goes out to the right.

Send in the wine,

That I may warm these palsied limbs of mine.

[His mien is drooping, as he stares into the fire.

Strange are the thoughts which firelight always gives;

Man is a flame that kindles, blazes, lives,

Burns to an ash, then dwindles, flickers, dies.

THE WOMAN. And women, sir, are not made otherwise.

[He turns, and behind him stands an old and wrinkled woman, in a loose robe, open sandals on her feet, a cord at her waist. Her hair is bound and caught up in the classical fashion with a dirty piece of faded blue ribbon. She has once been very beautiful, and there are faint traces in her face. She sets a big leather bottle of wine and several drinking cups made of silver on the table, one of which she fills, and offers it to the OLD MAN.

THE WOMAN. Our beauty is but fuel for your flame,

And so consumed, a half-remembered name,

We quarrel for possession of those lips

To which we once would deign but finger-tips.

## SOUTHERLY

OLD MAN. Good woman, I am now too old for lies,  
 You speak the truth. Come read it in these eyes,  
 Which kindled once at every pretty dress,  
 And for a night were faithful more or less.  
 But let my years be courteous to age,  
 Since Youth neglects us both.

*[He draws up a chair in a ceremonious fashion, and achieves a courtly bow. He presses the cup upon her.]*

I am your page,  
 Madame, be seated. You will take I trust  
 A cup of wine? My lady, come, you must.

SHE *[taking it]*. I thank you, sir, as I have thanked before  
 The sons of kings, alas, and many more.

HE. Add to your princes yet another one.  
 I am a king whose reign has not begun,  
 And never will, although in years I range  
 Beyond the limits of dynastic change.

SHE. Then let me pay due homage to your fame,  
 O crownless one, by watching close the flame  
 Wherein you must describe, as each appears,  
 The princely phantoms of the faded years.

HE. I see a king upon a throne in France;  
 The waves about my venturing vessel dance,  
 The torches wave in darkness; faces gleam,  
 The Highland pipers play. . . .

*[He fetches a sigh, and pauses. He looks at his companion, who is staring into the fire and does not appear to have noticed that he has stopped.]*

Alas, in dream.

But all your thoughts have wandered far from me,  
 To distant ways where they have longed to be  
 Through all these irksome hours in living bound.  
 Let me stand also on that holy ground.

*[He smiles gently, and she starts from her reverie.]*

SHE. Then you must do what no Greek ever could,  
 Unless he came in peace, or Horse of wood,  
 Enter the walls of Troy, and near my side  
 Watch all the sons of Priam, in their pride  
 Returning home from battle. Hector, first,  
 Of all the Grecian scourges counted worst,  
 Paris, then Deiphobus near him placed,  
 Whose bed in turn the yielding Helen graced.  
 Woman are fashioned thus—But now the last,  
 The fairest and the youngest Prince goes past.  
 Troilus, O Troilus, pity in her shame . . . !

## SOUTHERLY

*[She stops, and breaks off, as though she had said too much already, then continues.]*

A foolish woman peering in a flame.

HE. Fear not, Cressid, that ancient string to touch,  
For I am old, and have forgotten much.

Time has outworn in turn the walls of Troy,  
And all I gleaned about them when a boy.

*[She stands, when he says her name, and covers her eyes as though to ward a blow, and looks sadly away. The OLD MAN takes the hand which hangs at her side, and raises it to his lips. She begins to sing, in a voice which is still sweet.]*

SHE. I sing of love, that weak and hapless dies  
When lip no longer clings to lip, and eyes  
Seek not their image in another's gaze.  
A woman's but a plaything made in jest  
For man to hold and take into his breast  
When he grows tired of hunting all his days.  
I was a woman, Troilus; I was sent  
From Trojan walls unto my father's tent  
And Diomedes sought me. I was young.  
Forget the ardent body that must live;  
Troilus, my heart, untouched, is yours. Forgive,  
And if you care, remember. I have sung.

*[She passes out at the rear door, at the same time as the sound of footsteps on the pavement outside is heard: she takes the wine bottle with her. There is a knocking at the door, and the HOST OF THE KEYS appears once more, still grumbling and rubbing his eyes.]*

HOST. Will this infernal traffic not be done?  
My day's no sooner ended than begun.

*[He unbars the door and swings it open.]*

Come in, good sirs. A chilly night, but fine.  
Make yourselves easy, while I send for wine.

*[He goes out again with a jangle of keys. The OLD MAN has not bothered to turn his head and look at the newcomers, one of whom is in the dress of a Trojan warrior, the other in the fighting dress of a Highland clansman of the '45, Maclean Clan Tartan. Both are young, in their early twenties. They throw helmet and bonnet on the table, and THE TROJAN comes across and stretches out his hands to the blaze, while the OLD MAN stares on, unheeding.]*

THE TROJAN. Will you not share the blaze? *[Turning]* Draw near.

THE HIGHLANDER *[shaking his head]*. Your Southern blood is not so used,  
I fear,

To cold, as mine, for I have herded sheep  
When on my native hills the snow was deep,  
And with my plaid about my shoulders wound,  
Have settled me to sleep on open ground.

*[The OLD MAN turns half round, but then resolves his thoughts once more into the fire.]*

But you were saying, just before we came  
 Into the room, your eldest brother's name  
 Is also mine. Then I to you am strange  
 By so much less, for Custom, hating change,  
 Through him will love me more, and ready tongue  
 Call first on me to hear his praises sung.

THE TROJAN. But one is dearer than my brother's yet,  
 The name my lips will last of all forget.

*[He turns and sees CRESSIDA, who stands in the doorway, bearing wine. Her lips are parted, she clutches at her breast and is deeply moved, and then advances slowly, like Patience on a monument smiling at Grief.]*

CRESSIDA *[in a light tone]*. And could that name by any chance be mine?

THE TROJAN *[looks into her eyes and sighs]*. Woman, I sing of fairer lips  
 than thine.

*[She bites her lip, is pale, places the wine on the table and turns sadly away towards the fire. The OLD MAN now turns, and seeing her, puts out a kindly hand, and draws her to the chair at his side. She is still watching THE TROJAN, who fills a cup for himself and THE HIGHLANDER, who sits down at the table. THE TROJAN drains the cup and declaims.]*

THE TROJAN. I was a prince of dreams; my little realm  
 Was made of vows and kisses, sealed by token.  
 I saw my sleeve upon a Grecian helm,  
 And knew that I was lost, my kingdom broken.  
 And so I fled remembrance of the past  
 With broken lovers' friends, a sword, a shield,  
 When Honour, fighting near us at the last,  
 Beckoned to Death, who led me from the field.  
 I drove her image out of thought to perish  
 On trackless plain and unremembered hill,  
 But never would my heart refuse to cherish  
 The frail, the false, but fallen, fairer still.  
 Could I but look again into her eyes  
 My broken fetters Cressid would renew,  
 And I not wish for freedom to be wise,  
 But rest content, unknowing false from true.

THE WOMAN. O Troilus, prince of love forever young,  
 I hear your voice; my wasted heart is wrung,  
 And dim with tears I look and see the boy  
 That every woman loves. . . . The gates of Troy  
 Have crumbled down with me to withered dust,  
 But somewhere your Cressida lives. . . .

*[In a decisive tone, as if to convince herself.]*  
 She must.

## SOUTHERLY

TROILUS. Who speaks? Your face is lost in shadow, see

*[He looks in her face and shakes his head.]*

I know you not.

CRESSIDA. Alas, you know not me?

*[She turns to the OLD MAN, who nods his head as if to give assent to an unvoiced question.]*

CRESSIDA. I . . . was a woman in the Grecian camp,  
Who forgetfulness to heroes lent.

*[She pauses, then continues in a firmer tone.]*

For each I lit the warrior's nuptial lamp,  
Then took my path into another tent.  
But Cressida, the woman Troilus knew,  
Loved him for all her life. . . .

*[Her voice breaks. She falls silent. The OLD MAN turns to TROILUS.]*

OLD MAN. She died with you,  
And ever since no poet fails to tell  
Of how the cry was raised of Troilus killed,  
And Cressid wandered wildly out, and fell,  
Until the very Gods were touched, and willed  
The death she longed, to ransom her from shame.  
Now love eternal's plighted in her name  
Her waywardness is but an evil dream,  
A mortal stain which dyes the crystal stream  
Of beauty to a most pathetic shade  
Of frail humanity, that will not fade  
Until there's no more pleasure in a kiss.  
Go, seek her still, young man. Remember this.  
A rose may lose a petal to the wind,  
Would Troilus say the rose had thereby sinned  
And hold her sweet no more, and not a rose?

TROILUS. Continue not, nor think that Troilus knows  
Wisdom no deeper in his ghostly part  
Than on the earth inflamed his jealous heart

*[Singing.]*

O, sooner will the lark forget to sing,  
Or build his nest within the swaying grass  
Than I forget the evening when I chanced  
To stray abroad, and saw Cressida pass.  
The river will remember not the rain,  
The blossom will forget to bend the bough  
In each returning springtime, ere I wish  
For other lips than hers I long for now.

*[He stands with clasped hands. As the song ends, CRESSIDA vanishes through the doorway. THE HIGHLANDER comes forward.]*

THE HIGHLANDER. Then, Troilus, you and I must look together  
Down all the timeless roads among the dead,  
I for a rose that flourished in the heather,  
The bonnie prince for whom my blood was shed.

## SOUTHERLY

[*The OLD MAN raises his eyebrows, turns in his seat, and addresses himself to THE HIGHLANDER. THE TROJAN steps back.*

OLD MAN. The roads of death are long with years, and strange,  
For men grow old, while even princes change.  
Illusion paints the haggard face of Truth  
With scarlet patches for a while, but Youth

[*Stares at his hands.*

Cannot for long conceal within our clay  
The gaunt articulation of decay.  
But who are you? Perchance my wisdom lies,  
And with your prince it may be otherwise.

THE HIGHLANDER [*proudly, his hand on sword*]. My name is Hector, and  
my Chief Maclean

Of Druiminin; on Culloden's heath I fell.  
My father and my brothers all were slain  
And there we lay together. It is well;  
For now I roam the country of the dead,  
Seeking the Prince for whom I fought and died,  
That I may guard for evermore his head,  
And turn the swords of evil from his side.  
Tearlach is brave, and generous, and true,  
His eyes are merry, but his path is sown  
With shadows which forever I pursue,  
Until at length we win him back his own.  
I seek my Prince, to bid him to return,  
And rule again our hearts. For well he knows,  
At his dear name they leap, and fiercely burn,  
And redden with their blood his spotless rose.

OLD MAN [*in a harsher voice*]. But if he knew so much, Maclean, what then?  
Your Prince grew old the same as other men.

[*Bitterly.*

He fled the stricken field whereon you fell;  
His brave appearance was a hollow shell  
That hid corruption, vanity, and vice,  
And all he ventured once he dared not twice.  
His country and his sword he soon forgot,  
Honour, disused for drink, was left to rot,  
And women made his ruin. So he died,  
A craven waste of spirit in its pride.  
Out of his cup he drank the very lees,  
Disgrace, and dissipation, and disease.

MACLEAN [*angrily*]. I'll not believe it, sir. You make a jest  
To try the Highland heart within my breast.  
But when I think of Tearlach's laughing face,  
His fiery vigour, and his warlike grace,  
I know a tongue that's false from one that's true,

[*Scornfully.*

And I'd as lief believe that he were you.

## SOUTHERLY

OLD MAN [*half to himself*]. The cut is keen, and cruel, not unkind,  
Truth lurks in jest, and Love, they say, is blind.

[CRESSIDA emerges from the doorway, where she has been listening  
in the shadows. She has a lamp in her hand.

CRESSIDA. But I advance that it were better so.  
The night is late, and withered shades must go  
And leave the world for others to discuss  
Who have their youth, and no more need of us.

[*She appeals to the old man.*

But first, my friend, you owe it to the days  
When you alike were young, and went the ways  
Of high endeavour, to remove the shame  
You cast, in jest, upon the royal name.  
For loyal hearts are brittle, being pure,  
And broken once, but dully may endure.

[*The OLD MAN rises and turns to go with her, then speaks to  
MACLEAN.*

OLD MAN. Forgive me: I am old, and Age must jeer,  
For beauty is that living thing we fear.  
It makes long days grow bitter with regret  
For what we were, who will be lower yet,  
When, mind and hope and honour past and gone,  
A dribbling brutish mouth lives blindly on.  
Fear for your Prince no longer. In his prime  
The Gods recalled they loved him. It was time.  
The Stewart cause, the Stewart rose, had shed  
Its fairest petals; Great MacBain was dead,  
MacGillivray, MacLachlan, slept at last,  
The forest flowers were falling thick and fast  
When Tearlach called the remnant to his side,  
And, making front against the advancing tide,  
They stood, until the wave of battle crept  
Over and past, and all the heroes slept.

MACLEAN [*eagerly and impulsively*]. I thank you, sir. I knew it would be so,  
When early in the fight Death laid me low;  
And, like a groom that hastens to his bride,  
I'll travel on, until at Tearlach's side

[*Drawing his claymore, and brandishing it in the air.*  
I stand and wave my claymore in his name.

TROILUS [*coming forward and standing at his side*]. And I'll not rest until  
the burning flame  
That Cressid lit within my breast, shall cast  
Its golden radiance on the lonely past.

[CRESSIDA and the OLD MAN move slowly up the stairs, she with a  
lamp, he carrying his hat. The young men return to the table and  
pour out wine.

CRESSIDA. I'll light your steps. Come. Let us now depart,  
For legends may not claim a breaking heart,

And we must rest content that young desire  
Retrieves so fair an image from the mire  
Of worthlessness in which our living closed.

THE PRETENDER [*as they reach the balcony and turn to look back*]. The Gods  
must laugh who such a thing disposed.

Alas, that we were weak and lived too long.  
Their hearts were true, and as their love was strong,  
Eternal hope will spring within their breast,  
And they be happy in an endless quest  
Of lovely things which they will never find.  
The desolation of a sated mind  
They will not know, Cressida. It was wise  
To buy their kingdom with a pack of lies.

[MACLEAN is giving a toast below. His foot is on the table in Gaelic fashion.]

MACLEAN. Come, fill the cup, and pledge with me in wine,  
The bravest prince of all his Royal line.

TROILUS. I drink; and now on Hector I will call.  
To Cressida, the loveliest of all.

[*As they drink, THE PRETENDER takes the rose from his bonnet, and hands it to CRESSIDA. She kisses it, and binds it with ribbon from her hair. Together they lean and watch.*]

CRESSIDA. How foolish, yet how beautiful it seems.

THE PRINCE. We were but flesh, and now are dreams.

[CRESSIDA throws the rose down upon the table as the curtain falls. It rises immediately, and shows, in the place where the OLD MAN and the OLD WOMAN had been standing, a young and beautiful woman, and at her side, the gallant and handsome figure of Prince Charles Edward Stewart, as he appeared at the time of the '45. He is in Highland dress, and she in the robes of Trojan antiquity. A silvery light streams down upon them. CRESSIDA throws a kiss to TROILUS, who has run forward and stands looking eagerly up at her, with the rose in his hand. THE PRINCE is smiling as he looks down on MACLEAN, who is turned towards him, one foot still on the table, and his claymore drawn and flourished in the air. The young men raise their cups to their lips as the curtain falls  
on

#### THE RIBBON AND THE ROSE.

## SOUTHERLY

### VIRGIN YOUTH

Now Virgin Youth in 1944

Leaves textbook's neatness early, has elderly hands,  
Brittle nails, the assertive flourish of fists  
That lathe and corrosive have battered into function.  
The tram that cruises through the restive suburbs  
Contains him nightly. He straphangs or squats,  
Talking his splendid squalid pictures framed  
In gestures sensual as a soldier's joke.

No regent or heir presumptive, he already  
Beardless has seized his kingdom; see his subjects—  
The big-hipped girl, the international scene,  
Jive and the Public Library, love, the machines,  
The tussle in the Union, what'll-happen-next?,  
Horror of death, pity for the undersexed.

There's no delinquent here, but one whose plans  
Love's hands and wisdom's never ground to lock  
With common sprocket, whose own violent urge  
Must arbitrate all impulse, one whose pledge  
Must be rephrased and freshly sworn each day.  
His only lexicon—his comrades' laughter,  
The lonely night, the vocab. of defeat.

War he knows well, not the newsreel's cushioned stress,  
But in terms of the missing cousin who came on raids  
In the city's subconscious, the luscious café's posterior,  
The lucrative alley, who taught him to smoke and speak  
A curious syntax more intricate than Greek.  
His nursery rhyme was Production's humming of haste.  
Was he not made of war, of war's neglect,  
By sweaty crowd, political élan,  
By cramp of bone, by critical supply  
Of lazy goods delicious unto youth?

Oh you who in silver past could meander with languour  
Through your youth's untrammelled districts, gauge carefully  
The raw smell of his conduct and his slang;  
See that your eye and your rule be true to his time.  
He is excelsior with rivet and girder. He climbs the depths.  
And he comes, when tremor and shellburst have rocked away,  
To weld hard history in the shining air.

MUIR HOLBURN.

## "THE GOLDEN AGE OF AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE"

1860-1870

*(A further extract from George Gordon McCrae's  
papers, made by kind permission of Mr Hugh McCrae)*

It was for this decade that our Poet-physician Patrick Moloney proudly claimed the title of "the Golden Age of Australian Literature".

The cords of the lyre in his case, like the bow-strings of Phoebus-Apollo, were not always tense. It was not so much what he sung that counted. . . . "Saturate of his theme", it appears possible that he had believed (as many another has done) that he had committed to writing and published strophes only recited to his "fit audience of a few". So it came to pass that Moloney was less known to the world as a poet than physician, though he presented, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, a happy blend of both. The few of his pieces that found their way into print bore the hall-mark of genius, fresh, clean, well-rounded and unaffected altogether; in short, with all that charm of modesty which bespoke the man. Here to describe him a few words must suffice. Picture to yourselves a young fellow of something over six feet, of erect carriage, stout and florid, head of a classic model set well upon a pair of broad shoulders, the eyes large, of a deep blue and slightly prominent; nose straight and long but shapely, the lips full and sensuous, barely concealed by a thin moustache (otherwise he was clean-shaven). He had an abundance of dark, wavy hair which just escaped being black, and trimmed in a manner more suggestive of the professional man than of the poet. His expression was altogether benevolent and in his smile a certain fascination that won upon his audience great or small. His voice, for so large a man, was soft and cultured. The pleasure of conversing with him was surely enhanced when he recited among ourselves other fellows' verses or prose even; but, for a treat, it certainly was to be a listener at one or other of his lectures, which by the way were "few and far between". I never, to my recollection, heard him sing, but assuredly the singer's face was his, and he being a poet and master in rhythm, it is needless to add that he had the musician's ear. He delighted in Grand Opera and at this period Lyster was giving the untravelled Australians the time of their lives. . . . One was always knocking up against him whether in stalls or pit or in the crush-room of the old "Royal" with "Africaine" or "Norma" or "Sonnambula" in the air, or even the more homely "Bohemian Girl" or the "Figlia del Reggimento", with the deep-voiced Emile Coulon in full war paint.

Although his circle of acquaintance professional and personal was a wide one, his aspirations, his struggles and his performances were best known to a small inner circle of friends who knew best how to appreciate his disposition and his work.

Big, genial, jovial and hearty, he was, being Irish by near descent, blessed with the happiest sense of humour and a fondness for a good joke, as well as with a wit of the keenest and yet the most amiable, but there was a peculiar savour attaching to his letters which it was impossible to read without confessing to their charm; some fraught with an elegant and thoughtful criticism, others charged with rich and poetic imagery, others again bubbling over with the purest bonhomie. All these too expressed with the freshness of youth (sound mind in sound body) bright and incisive, kindly and hospitable. Why are we denied a few volumes of these letters in our Pacific Library here? And he too our Australian Goldsmith! Too late now to inquire. Several lost or mislaid. Some people too have so rooted a habit of destroying letters *as soon as read*, that supposing even a collection made of the letters surviving it might hardly fill a single octavo volume.

Apology is unnecessary for presenting this brief mention of Moloney before the recollections of his more-published confrères, seeing that it is he and no other who became the author of the phrase (since classic) "The Sixties, the Golden Age of Australian Literature".

In so far as the "Golden Age" term concerned Victoria, one might say at more or less risk of contradiction that it mainly applied to a coterie in Melbourne. . . . It was no syndicate, not even an association with "Limited" attached to its designation: just a knot or club of a few young fellows engaged in "cultivating literature on a little oatmeal". . . . Without attempting to fix its number or to hazard a guess at its supporters from without, say the Suburbs or the Bush, one may remark that the five principal and original Members were "Orion" (Richard Henry Hengist) Horne, Henry Clarence Kendall, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Marcus Clarke, Dr Patrick Moloney, Richard Birnie. With the exception of Birnie we were all, myself included, "Yoricks"—early members of the "Yorick" Club in fact, and whose stationery of the period, as I remember, was embossed with the "Chandos-bust of Shakespeare". Myself an early member, I wonder whether the cognizance be carried down to the present day.

The Yorick primarily and purely a literary club, it was held requisite that any person put up for Election should exhibit in evidence of qualification some book, treatise, poem or pamphlet, etc., of which he was the author. . . .

It seeming good in later days to relax the qualification clause a little, persons of literary tastes and leanings though not themselves literary came to be admitted within the charmed circle. The stage came to be very fairly represented, the Medical profession followed, Artists fell in gladly, the journalists we had with our other poor from the beginning, but one day when the name of the Chief Commissioner of Police appeared on the Notice board the majority were filled with astonishment and all sorts of questions pertinent to the occasion (if impertinent in themselves) were asked, and, as this as well as what occurred in the sequel became "Town Talk", one may be excused for repeating it here and that without any disrespect to the Club of the past in which we bore our "small part". The "qualification" still obtaining though in a modified degree, two members, according to my information, were detailed to wait upon the Chief Commissioner (himself a man at once genial and humorous) with the view of ascertaining his qualifications for membership.

The question politely but firmly put, was met at once by the terse and apposite reply, "Gentlemen of the Yorick, am I not the Editor of the *Police Gazette*!" They had got their answer and that with military promptitude; bowed themselves out and returned to make their report. Soon after, the new Member was duly elected. Should any modern doubt the accuracy of this story as given, it might be competent for him to inquire at the club whether at some time during the latter Sixties the name of Captain Frederick Charles Standish, Rd., did not appear upon the roll and thereunder the title of Chief Commissioner of Police. He was a very busy officer and perhaps his visits were like those of the angels, "few and far between". For myself I may say I never happened to be on the spot when he happened to look in, whether to taste of our curious vintages or to scribble a note on Club paper. Closely following on his spurred heels a select body of Police Officers was naturally enough to be expected, but in Gladstonian phrase they were "conspicuous by reason of their absence". What charm the Yorick might have held for them is unknown to the present deponent unless possibly that they believed we kept in addition to poets, essayists and poetasters a circulating library with all the latest novels, not to mention a *nec plus ultra* brand of whisky. Among our early and regularly qualified members was George Augustus Walstab. Attached formerly to the dashing troop of Cadets affiliated to the Mounted Police Force "Consule Planco" (for Plancus read MacMahon, afterwards "Eques") but serving afterwards in 1857 with Richardson's Horse during the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in the latter stages,

he fought with distinction but was put out of action by an ugly wound in one of his feet from a matchlock ball. Before joining us he had served a brief apprenticeship to journalism and had for a short time edited the *Calcutta Englishman*, besides publishing a romance or two of his own. "A fellow of infinite jest", or to put it in another way, "excellent company"—Marcus and he together, with a knot of young fellows about them, and one was cock-sure of a merry evening, all "shop" being flung to the winds. But in any case it was tacitly understood among us: it had become an unwritten law . . . that "shop" should never be suffered in the "Yorick".—The main "shop" was peripatetic, given out "chemin faisant", "ambulando", as you will, but where it came by parcels on the footpaths and roadways it massed itself in some of the caravanseraï-restaurants of Collins and Bourke Streets. There we had our Lindsay Gordon, our Marcus and our Birnie, our Orion, our Moloney at their brightest and their best. Kendall was, for the most part, when of our company, a good listener or an occasional interjector, but to get him rightly was to take a quiet walk with him and have him all to one's self. Not that Kendall was in the least deaf, but, like a person partially deaf who failed to hear properly where currents of different voices crossing completely spoiled conversation with the person just beside him, he (like Gordon) much preferred a *tête-à-tête*. . . .

It is to be observed, however, that Kendall made the cleanest breast of it over his Letters, which for my own part I was privileged to receive for years, letters critical, letters personal, letters with political allusions, opinions of men, friendly and otherwise, ideas touching this or that, others again perfect salmagundis. . . . Extremely sensitive, he craved sympathy, and where he received it never was a fellow more grateful, but he also not only cherished but nourished what sense he had of injuries real or imagined that he had received on his way through the world. Hard indeed to talk him out of the purely imaginary injuries which while the feeling lasted were as real for him as the actual. "Genus irritabile!" as old Birnie would have remarked, waving his huge silver-headed Malacca in mid air like the truncheon of a drum-major. . . .

Richard Birnie was certainly one of the most striking among the older members of the coterie, barrister, essayist, weaver of verses and what not besides. He was of us for there was scarcely a man of us that he had not made a friend, yet in the sense of being a member of the Yorick he did not really belong to us.

He was looked up to quite beyond being "a good fellow", as "a dungeon of information", an "inquire within for every thing"; replete

with anecdote and story, this our Citizen of the World with the tall napless white hat and great Malacca cane fairly bubbled over with a merry wit, accompanied by appropriate gesture as it was. There were those who accused him of upsetting conversation and drifting into monologue. This but served to show the tenacity of his grip of the subject and his guard against losing the thread of his discourse, though without involving a suspicion of rudeness.

In any case his talk was as gold, compared with the aimless chatter of a wilderness of Society-monkeys, and, if he did on occasion take to his own the "lion's share" of the conversation, it came to him with little doubt from his habit as a lecturer.

After a considerable time (who shall now say how long?) passed in an absolute wrestle with poverty, James Smith, Editor of the *Australasian*, always an appreciative friend, succeeded in getting him a fair living and keeping him in pocket money as well.

He had him appointed on the Staff of the *Australasian* as Essay-writer, and it was precisely from his pulpit at the head of the "Essayist"-column that he lavished on an appreciative reading-public the treasure of a well stored mind, his keener observations on men and things. Learned, merry, witty, pathetic and all by turns, he kept firm hold on his readers.

He was a son of Sir Richard Birnie the celebrated Bow Street Magistrate, favourite of the Prince Regent. Brought up in the study of the Law, he practised his profession with more or less of success in the Old Country, as also in West Australia whither he had migrated and where eventually he was appointed Judge Advocate General.

It was in Perth or near it he had to experience the heaviest sorrow of his life in the loss of his wife to whom he was tenderly attached.

Having no special ties then to hold him in the West, he crossed over to Melbourne, where, being admitted to the Victorian Bar, he recommenced practice bravely, and against odds amid the vigorous competition going on amid perhaps the most brilliant and witty set of barristers we had so far known, among whom Aspinall, Dawson and Ireland, to mention no others.

Learned, Birnie undoubtedly was; apt at fence and repartee, never at a loss for an apposite quotation or citation and yet as we believed never in love with a profession he had simply adopted owing to stress of circumstances.

The Fairy Godmother present at his Christening should have marked him down for a Man of Letters instead of purveying him a wig and gown. It is not so often that we find the two professions

combined in one person, but surely it was so in Birnie's case. . . . When he flung wig and gown aside, then it was that the Man of Letters stood out and clearly revealed. . . . His acquaintances were Legion but his real friends might perhaps have been counted on one's fingers.

Nor was it so much that his genius for friendship was small, as that having suffered none can tell what in the course of his career, he had become not soured but wary and discriminating to a degree. . . . To such friends as he had made he was true and held them to him "with hoops of steel", whether for better or for worse.

Like most elderly men of the world of kindly disposition, he loved the young . . . children very much always . . . but to my mind was more than happy in his relations with young men and more specially so with such as happened to show signs of promise or talent. He had a warm affection for the young Marcus, or "the Elf" as he had rechristened him on account of his breezy disposition and what he called his "pretty and tricky ways". A strange pair, to see them together.

The one tall, old, bald and didactic though genial and amusing, the other a mere miniature man, young, gay, brisk and self-assertive, with all the world beginning to open out before him yet affecting the talk, the airs and the manners of his elders. These were our golden days when Birnie played Mentor to Marcus's Telemachus: none of us rich, none highly placed; all Bohemians in grain: Socialists of the more exalted order, we would have pooled our narrow purses but that some must have held back as having so little to contribute. Thus it was duty with us as well as a common act of bonhomie that he who happened to be "flush" should "stand treat" for the small crowd all round so that no exceptions should be made.

Some of us, "the Elf" leading, for we could not persuade Birnie to be "Yorick" or "spell his name with a 'Y'", as the phrase went, started a new Club of our own outside.

After a crowd of difficulties surmounted we managed so as to secure a *pied-à-terre* in the lane at the back of the *Argus* Office. ("Blossom's Lane" I think they called it.) The house was large enough for all our purposes but wanted a lot of scrubbing,\* brooming and whitewash and a little, very little, inexpensive furniture, which in, we awaited the opening day or rather night.

We moved in, "the Elf" leading as before, and unanimously elected Birnie Perpetual President with autocratic powers.

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\*"A surprising lack of saponacity".—Birnie.

There were no laws and none of those mean little things called by-laws, the President's Will and Word standing always for Law. Officers were appointed on the spot, their several titles and duties prescribed, and themselves each solemnly sworn-in, using a very high-sounding and flesh-creeping oath supposed of the Elizabethan period but as likely as not an imitation cunningly worded and hot from the Jovian brain of the Elf.

Marcus has already and admirably immortalized "the Cave of Adullam" in his story "Twixt Shadow and Shine", so there is no need to say more here unless I take the liberty of indicating myself as Comrade "Splash", a name conferred upon me by "the Elf" as indicating the Artist whose duty it had become to decorate the walls of the "Cave" with frescoes symbolic and otherwise.

Cave-rule lasted but a few months but as we took no note of time in those days I find myself unable to state the date when we were requested by the landlord to move out as he had other views for the hoary and ramshackle old building. We missed it all very much: the mock heroics, the mock-dignity more dignified even than the real, with the Autocrat in the chair; the talk, the yarns, the disputations, the appeal to authority and the schoolboy larks and the sheer fun of it all. . . . There never was a second Adullam though perhaps the nearest approach to it was, both in and out of office hours, the headquarters of the *Colonial Monthly* (of which Marcus had become Editor). The office was in lower Elizabeth Street nearly opposite the "Duke of Rothesay" Hotel. Here, taking up my old Adullamitish practice, as "Splash" I decorated the better part of the walls—but for the most part here in pencil-outline boldly achieved. . . . One of these compositions appeared to be highly esteemed not only by the principal figure in it but by the comrades, who were almost all Adullamites to a man. It represented a remarkably dashing light cavalryman reining back his horse on its haunches, he himself describing fireworks in the air with his crooked sabre—but as in other instances it was the legend which conferred the finishing touch: "Yes! gentlemen, it is true that I was once a policeman (Mounted Policeman), but then . . . Ye Gods! What a Policeman!!!"

This was Walstab, who before he went out to India had served in the "Cadets", who in their blue and silver lace used to be the cynosure of petticoated Melbourne. Then again our Treasurer had a figure of himself on the outer side of his door representing a man in a sitting posture with a great gallon measure at his lips, with the legend subscribed "J.J.S. in 'Liquidation'".

## SOUTHERLY

For Messenger we had a small boy whom John Shillinglaw, formerly "Ancient" of the Adullamites, had named "Shrimp": most of us thought that the cognomen had been even more descriptive if shorn of its first three letters, for useful as he was made to be in various directions he was Imp all over: a sort of compromise between a rouse-about and a waiter. His chiefest function when not running errands was in making a progress across the street at least once a day bearing a huge tin with him to the Duke of Rothesay, with whom the *Colonial Monthly* had a friendly understanding. The beer if "Colonial" was of the best, and punctually supplied and delivered at lunch hour.

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## POETS,

Do you, too, lie awake at night  
planning poems that a job you hate  
has left you too knocked-up to write?

And swearing poetry's a waste of time  
one day, do you sweat the next  
for hours to make one perfect rhyme?

Do you feel lonely, unable to share  
the astounding popular stock  
of ideas in bad repair?

If once you really spoke your mind  
would there be such a hullabaloo  
that you'd lose your job, be jugged, or fined?

And are deeds that make other men tear their hair  
nothing to you, while deeds they praise  
make you despair or make you blaze?

FLEXMORE HUDSON.

## POPE AND NATURE

By L. H. ALLEN

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same.

No term, throughout the course of literature, is more ambiguous than "Nature"; and before estimating Pope's dictum we must first find its meaning. What he certainly did not mean by "Nature" was the state of Rousseau's natural man. We know how Montaigne glorified the savage (it was only, I believe, a literary whim which made good reading), and what flaws in his picture Shakespeare had to find. Pope would hardly have subscribed to the doctrine of original virtue. His picture of the "poor Indian" then, though he may remark flittingly on his superiority to "proud science", in no way glorifies primitivism. Indeed, the allusion is made only to illustrate the maxim that man, however crude, can cherish hope. I doubt if the state of the savage had any real interest for Pope at all.

If Pope meant anything by a State of Nature, it was the state of Paradisal man. "The State of Nature was the reign of God", he says. In short, he adapts Vergil's Golden Age, and tints it with the shades of Milton's Eden.

Pride then was not, nor arts, that pride to aid;  
Man walk'd with beast joint tenant of the shade.

Possibly Montaigne contributed to the picture, as Elwin points out; but, in any case, there is no doubt that Pope wished to conform the biblical story to the classical legend of the Ages of Man. His picture, however, has nothing of Rousseau in it.

If such a Golden Age ever existed Pope understood well enough that man quickly degenerated into a predatory animal. Using "Nature", then, in the sense of the primitive passions, he traces man's gradual formation into social groups by rising to "Art"—

See him from Nature rising slow to Art!  
To copy instinct, then was reason's part.

What is "Art"? We find it is the "instinct" of Nature as opposed to the perverted "instinct" of degenerate man. That natural instinct is for law as, for instance, in the communities of ants and bees.

This is the central point of Pope's conception of nature, a nexus of laws the breaking of one involving the destruction of the rest. However blind or partial our human vision may be we must acknowledge that Nature is perfect, a harmonious unit.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.

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This leads us to a region far distinguished from the "Nature" of the Romantics. It lays stress on the philosophic, rather than the aesthetic, standpoint. The beauty of Nature appealed to the Romantics; the order to the Augustans. With the former "Nature" produced, in its best aspect, a Pantheistic emotion; in its worst, a prodigal sentimentality. With the latter its best effect was a Pantheistic sublimation, its worst a sterile syllogism.

Ever since man could organise his thoughts, he has tried to understand Nature. Religion, however, which so often means convention, by reason of the theory of divine forbiddal, has used the *taboo* to produce the static element in man's quest for knowledge. This causes, in its turn, the dynamic reaction. In these alternations it is the incidence that becomes important. When the static rules, fixation follows; when the dynamic, flux. Yet in flux or fixation the belief is always that Nature is being followed. It is only the interpretation of terms that differs.

For Pope, Nature is the fixed and perfect expression of God in matter—the condensation of that divine fire which never varies, is never incomplete. What we regard as imperfection is due to our imperfect vision. As an example of dynamism the 19th century gave a picture of a Nature which also was the expression of God, but an evolving one—a nature only potentially the best of all possible worlds.

When Pope's conception of Nature is applied to writing, we see at once that Nature for Pope is not so much a thing of freedoms as of limits:

Nature to all things fixed the limits fit.

But the conception of "limits" is not that of taboos: it is the finding of the *modus*, a word which means not only the adaptation of life to means, but also the finding of the "golden mean" between excesses. In Cicero's *De Senectute*, Cato is an excellent example of this. Whatever the disabilities of age he has managed to find the *modus*, the balance which makes life tolerable and profitable. Indispensable for that is the power of inward resource—"for those", he says, "who seek all good things from their own resources find nothing ill which Nature, in her inevitable round, brings". This implies the following of Nature. "In this I am wise", says Cato, "that I follow and obey Nature as my best guide, and as a deity." This Nature has been mentioned just previously as involving a "Necessity", a fixed order to which man must accommodate himself by finding his *modus*, the counterpoise, in proportion to his faculties, by which he avoids extremes.

In fact, Pope's first mention of "Nature" has nothing to do with what we generally understand by the term. It means "the capacity of

your faculties". Some men, he says, have memory, but lack understanding: some have imagination but no memory:

One science only will one genius fit,  
So vast is Art, so narrow human wit.

When, therefore, Pope continues, "first follow Nature", we find his injunction perfectly logical. "Nature", he says, "is a perfect whole." Man is defective, not only in his faculties, but also in his use of them:

Some to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse,  
Want as much more to turn it to its use.

But man must try to be perfect: he must imitate Nature, making himself as complete a unit as he can. The means to that end is Art, which is simply man's way of making explicit for his own guidance what in Nature is implicit. Art is "Nature methodised". It does not matter, in this relation, whether you say that Art follows Nature, or Nature follows Art. If you think of Nature as a complex of principles wrought to an uncomprehended unity by the Divine Mind, Art follows Nature, for Nature is then the Platonic *Eidos*. If, on the other hand, you think of Nature as expressing herself in us by a complex of instincts which we have to regulate, then Nature follows Art, for Art becomes the *Eidos*.

This puts us in a better position to understand first why Greece is the pattern for the artist, second why Homer is "Nature". Greece is the great exemplar because she possessed, in far greater degree than Rome, the creative impulse together with the power of its government:

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,  
When to repress, and when indulge, our flights.

That is the Roman *modus*, which, however, was applied by the Romans more to the conduct of life than to the pursuit of art. The Greeks, with their winged inspiration, applied the principle no less to Art than to Life. That was necessary because a strong impulse involves a strong imposition of form. Thus criticism assumed her true function, that of the "Muses' handmaid"—that is, an illuminating, not a repressive, force.

I believe Pope felt this, and that he was not merely repeating, like a schoolboy, Horace's

*Vos exemplaria Graeca  
Nocturna versate manu, versate diurna.*

If we now find Pope stating that Nature and Homer are the same, we shall not imagine his meaning to be: "Homer is a glorious wild-flower, sprung from Nature, by some amazing intuition reflecting life truly and vividly." We shall expect, rather, "Homer is the greatest example of 'Nature' because in him those laws which we call 'Art', and

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which are our attempt to approach the inner unity of Nature, are best exemplified."

How different is this from such a conception of Homer as Shakespeare's "Hold the mirror up to Nature"! *Troilus and Cressida* makes it evident that he regarded Homer as presenting Nature with a veneer, which he felt urged to strip. We know the result—a picture of the Iliadic figures as frivolous, boastful, cowardly, lustful.

From such a picture, Pope would have recoiled, for in Homer's case the "methodising" of Nature meant the creation of the Type, which Pope would have gathered at once from Horace. "Achilles", says the Roman, "must be impatient, passionate, ruthless, fierce"—in other words, the great characters become abiding types, in which, just as in the gods, certain groups of qualities are presented, removed as far from the particular as possible. Shakespeare said, somewhat savagely, in his drama: "I'll give you the men themselves." Pope replies: "What we want is their sublimation." That is the difference between the realist and the idealist, or, rather, between the concrete and the abstract; and it is useless to attempt to reconcile them.

Blake, who hated the Classics, and who pushed Romantic freedom beyond all "limits" into the fourth dimension, instinctively turns from Homer: "Every poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity, but why Homer's is peculiarly so, I cannot tell; he has told the story of Bellerophon, and omitted the Judgement of Paris, which is not only a part, but a principal part, of Homer's subject." That the Iliad contains patches of extraneous matter none will deny, but the reason for their presence need not be discussed here. What none will deny, either, is the mastery of a tone which no subsequent work has equalled in that genre. Even Horace admits that Homer may nod; but his lapses are rare, and never severe enough to spoil the effect of his amplitude.

That amplitude was, however, a measured one which Blake could not feel, but which Pope, his antithesis, the master of "Reason" poetry, was admirably adapted to appreciate. His poetry has something of the pattern arrangement which will never be welcome to those who desire the free wing. Once again Blake comes in aptly: "The Gods of Greece and Egypt were Mathematical Diagrams": (*the Laocöon Group*).

In his remarks on Homer, Blake must have had Pope, partly at least, in his mind, for he concludes with: "The Classics! it is the Classics, and not Goths or Monks, that desolate Europe with wars" (surely a reference to "and the Monks finished what the Goths begun"). These attitudes, the limitless and the limited, will always confront each other, and it is necessary that neither should be forgotten, for by their alternation they keep each other alive. Because of this we should

understand Pope's poetry as he understood it. Pope would have been the first to say that a poet is made as well as born: but what in Pope was born was precisely the faculty which felt the Classical canons: what was made was his labour over them. Yet he was by no means all labour; and what of positive he gave his own generation will always be valid.

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### SALUTATION TO THE SUN

Curled white notes,  
 whirled  
 some to earth,  
 hurled  
 skywards some  
 on wind squalls  
 come;  
 bird-calls these,  
 wind-taken  
 magpie cries  
 shaken  
 to flake-falls  
 of silver sound  
 wind-wound  
 from the rise,  
 where, high  
 over pliant dark  
 scrub boulders,  
 a dead gum giant  
 thrusts bark-stark  
 shoulders, white  
 in the young light;  
 birds there,  
 a bevy,  
 a chevying flock,  
 wind-birl despite  
 and swerve and rock  
 and lurch of perch,  
 flute-salute  
 the shining One,  
 bright gold-beaten  
 wheat-golden Sun  
 who, bold on earth's  
 curved lip a Host,  
 flames forth  
 the Father, Son  
 and Holy Ghost.

PAUL L. GRANO.

## "TWENTY STRONG"

By MARGARET TRIST

"DELLA PARKINS, THE TEN-MILE FARM, BRANCH CREEK, VIA WOONGANATTIE" was painted in thin black lettering on the tin trunk. Della looked downward at it from the high seat of the buggy on which she sat, the lettering blurring and distorting through her tears.

"Here", said the driver of the buggy, who was also the mailman and who was at present unwillingly escorting Della to school in Woonganattie. It was shearing, and no one else had time. "Put your feet on it." He juggled the trunk into position with his foot and she rested her black buttoned boots on it, placing them sadly and sedately side by side. "Aren't you going to give your folks a wave?" he asked.

She turned and waved forlornly through the flap at the side. Her mother, on the back steps, her father, by the bootscraper, waved back. A flannel-singleted shearer washing his face in an enamel dish on a tripod outside the shearer's hut raised his arm and waved, too. Other shearers smoked outside the shed, filling in the moments before they must go inside. She could still feel the throb of the engines from the shed as they heated up. The sheep were restless in the yards. A bird note trembled intolerably in the air; the pumpkin vines flaunted yellow flowers and the clover was tenderly green beside the smooth silver of the dam. It made her feel sad as she drove away from it all in the clear bright light of the early spring morning. A tear pressed from under one eyelid and slid slowly down her cheek. She turned her head away from the white-painted house, the gently rolling paddocks and resolutely faced the road ahead, a grey road, soft with the dust of a rainless winter, winding away for ever across the plains. With one hand she smoothed her green crêpe dress over her thin hunched-up knees. It was a smart frock. She had picked it herself from the catalogue. "In shades of olive, rose, saxe and navy", mother had read out to her. "Olive", she had said. And now here she was riding to the end of the world in the stiff new dress, and watering it with her tears. Was this the outcome of picking a dress in which to be happy? It showed you never could tell. How many other girls were riding up or down Australia at this very minute, weeping down the front of their Sunday finery?

The mailman's name was Tom. He was a thin, old man, with tea-stained whiskers and a brown neck hanging in folds above his collarless, striped shirt. He glanced at Della uneasily. People haven't any right, he thought, sending a kid out done up like that. Them buttoned boots. Not worn any more, button boots aren't. Won't she have a time of it, landing at school in buttoned boots?

"Don't you want to go to school?" he asked.

"No", she answered.

"Come, now. You've got to be learned you know. Lessons aren't so bad once you get the hang of them."

"Oh, I can do lessons", Della replied loftily.

"What have you got to go to school for?"

"I'm too bad to stop home any longer", she told him mournfully.

"Bad! You don't look bad to me."

"Don't I? Well I am. I'm awful bad. I've given mother nerves."

"You don't say! What was it you did that was so bad?"

"Oh, everything—"

"For instance, now?"

Della stopped crying to pick and choose amongst her misdeeds. "I nearly got drowned in the dip last week", she said.

"Pooh! Did that once meself", replied Tom.

"Did you? What did everyone say?"

"Didn't say anything. They didn't know."

"But how did you get out?"

"Brother of mine. Big bloke. Pulled me up the side."

"Maybe if I'd had a brother—"

"They're handy when you're a kid", admitted Tom.

"Then I fell in a tank through a hole in the top. Gee it was terrible wet and dark—"

"You seemed to be set on getting yourself drowned."

"I've nearly been drowned most ways", replied Della modestly.

"In the creek and in the dam and once in the horse-trough."

"Kind of slimy", murmured Tom.

"Ugh", shivered Della, then looked at Tom suspiciously. "How do you know?"

Tom nodded his head. "Me, too, once."

Della's eyes were bright with interest. "Have you ever been bitten by a snake?" she asked.

"No. Have you?"

"Not quite, but I pulled one out of a log by its tail one day."

"How was it it didn't bite you?"

"The devil looks after his own, father said."

"I don't know as how that was a nice thing to say to a little girl", replied Tom thoughtfully. "Not that I'm any judge. I was never a hand with children."

"Didn't you have any children?"

"Lord love us. I had ten."

"Well how was it you never got your hand in?"

## SOUTHERLY

"I can't rightly remember. It was a long time ago and I was only home Sundays. A mail-run used to be a mail-run in those days."

"They couldn't have been bad like me."

"No worse or no better if you ask me. All kids are the same. Not good and not bad." His hands tightened on the reins and the horses came to a stop. "You just take a squint back that way. See them tin roofs. That's the last you'll see of your place for a few months. Now take a look over this way, across what we used to call the prairie. That's McAlistar's stockrails in the distance. Shift your eyes a little to the north. That belt of timber, that's Munro's. And in front here, where the road curves by the river, that's Ryan's. Big places, all of them. In the old days large families were reared on them. Nine kids here, ten kids there, twelve somewhere else, and so on. Fine kids, too. What they didn't know about sheep and cattle and horses wasn't worth knowing, either. You couldn't ride this way this time of the morning then and see the plains empty on every side of you. Shut me eyes now and I can see them mad MacAlistar boys galloping straight for me, putting their horses at the fences, standing straight in the stirrups, their black hair waving upright in the wind. Many's the time I threatened to tell their father of their wild ways. And what did they do? Laughed at me till the morning echoed, and I guess I deserved it." Tom lapsed into silence and sat quietly looking at the reins in his thin calloused hands. Della watched him covertly. She'd heard tell of the McAlistar boys, too, but most of them had been dead before she was born.

"You were telling me something", she said politely after a long time.

"Was I?" asked Tom, and jogged up the horses. They ambled forward and broke into a brisk trot, spiralling the dust softly into the sunny air. "I'm an old man and I forget."

"About all the children who used to be around here once", prompted Della.

"They're here no more", said Tom.

"There's me. But I'm bad."

"I guess I'd be bad, too, if I were the only little person for miles around."

"Would you?" asked Della delightedly.

The buggy swept down a slope and clattered over the bridge. Murphy's lay behind them, its roof burnished silver under the sun. "Time was", said Tom sorrowfully, "five little girls used to wave to me over the bridge railing. They used to wear pigtails and pinafores."

"I guess it was a long time ago."

"It was, but it weren't so quiet. Australia's a quiet place these days. I'm not the kind to want to tell the young people anything. The young people always know best, I reckon. But it's kind of funny."

"What's funny?"

"You, for instance. You're the only little girl for miles around. Four places that reared families and now among them all there's only you. What happens? You've got to be sent to school because you give your mother nerves, and your father—"

"I give him a headache."

"There! Don't you think it's funny?"

"No", said Della puzzledly. "It's not funny. Not at all."

Tom sighed. "Perhaps you're right", he said.

They went on endlessly over the winding road. Now and then a stunted gum flaunted its twisted trunk and abandoned curved leaves by the roadside, or a log hollowed greyly among the riotous spring grasses. They passed over culverts, and bridges that spanned waterless creeks. There was a wayside post-office, into which Tom disappeared for three minutes, and a wayside pub that held him captive for fifteen. He came back wiping his whiskers. "They want to put a car on this run now, but it's going to be over my dead body they do it", he told Della boastfully.

Della wasn't interested. "What's school going to be like?" she asked.

"School? Oh, school's all right. There's singing comes from there in the daytime. And at night the kids laugh and skylark on the lawns till bedtime. The sound floats across the creek and into the township. Look, that's the township, down there, Woonganattie. A good little town Woonganattie. As up to the minute as they're made. My, the kids are going to laugh when you hit Woonganattie in those buttoned boots."

"What's up with my boots?" asked Della ominously.

Tom looked at her. For the first time he noticed the set of her mouth and the light in her green eyes.

"I guess I was wrong" he muttered. "It's not the boots."

"What's up with my boots?" repeated Della.

"Nothing. Nothing." Tom averted his eyes hurriedly and, whipping up the horses, they fled along the curve that led into Woonganattie, drawing up with a flourish in front of the school. Della Parkins, the Ten-mile Farm, Branch Creek, via Woonganattie, had arrived at school. No princess of old was ever delivered with more aplomb to the austere way of learning—tin trunk, green crêpe dress, buttoned boots and all. "What's up with my boots?" said the light in her eyes. She was twenty strong—the kids everyone should have had, but hadn't.

## SOUTHERLY

### SWAMP COUNTRY

It is still winter on the darkening swamps  
Under the cold sweep of the western sky,  
High-arched and flawless, though the small, clear pools,  
Its gleaming splinters, on the black marsh lie.

My way runs on to the hills across the bay  
And there the spring has come, and peace has gone;  
In gardens dusk-deep under silver gums  
The dim, massed blossoms breathe a softness on  
The faithless air that in a day, an hour,  
Forgets the bright touch of the frosts, and then  
Is all scents, moths, and dews, and the old stir—  
I am in no haste to go that way again.

I shall not chant the worn-out dirge that tells  
How in the spring the heart's old wounds gape red,  
But winter has always been most kind to me,  
The shining season, late born and soon dead.  
These flowers grow only to a funeral  
And still behind this soft and scented mouth  
Grins the harsh skull of summer, the burnt bones  
That suck the soul unslaked through their long drouth.

But here no petalled treachery will dare  
The night-sown acres of my lonely peace  
Or dull the rawness of the clean salt wind—  
Yet my way runs on to the hills, and will not cease.

NAN McDONALD.

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### CENTENARY

(Gerard Manley Hopkins, born 1844)

For creatures counter original and spare  
He glory gave to God, as we for him  
Christ-centred poet—most individual and bare  
In England praised and prayed. Abrupt, strange, grim,  
The forged feature found him, as we're found by him.

So we too take his prayer  
That Britain his dear-rare

Have easter-dayspring break upon the dim-  
ness of its ancient faith: that they with him  
Now puissant in heaven-haven of the Reward  
Effect the purpose of grace-won-outpoured:

Mary for vernal atmosphere and Queen, for King again Our Lord.

MARTIN HALEY.

## WRITER AND READER

## WOMEN POETS

*Poems.* By Janet Beaton. (The Viking Press, Sydney. 1944.)

*Earth Cry.* By Norma L. Davis. (Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1943. 3s. 6d.)

*In a Convex Mirror.* By Rosemary Dobson. (Dymock's Book Arcade Ltd., 1944.)

Of these three volumes of verse by Australian women, only one is of any outstanding merit. The poems of Janet Beaton (Mrs. Jack Lindsay) fall into two main classes, the first written in an intimate, conversational style with a modern setting, the second romantic, decorative, inspired by things past. It is in these latter poems that she achieves most success. In the picture of Helen recreated by the gossipy old man in "Fuit Ilium" there is perhaps a too studied sensuality, but it is skilfully executed; and the two Juan pieces, "Don Juan de Nos Jours" and "The Funeral March of Don Juan" are an attractive blend of realistic humour and romantic regret. They are also interesting for their cleverly controlled rhythms: in the first piece she uses tripping trochees:

Since as yet I have not met them  
(Their small mouths are full of kisses  
And their eyes are full of secrets)  
I've had no time to forget them,  
But as near as I can reckon  
They're the girls I'll love tomorrow.

in the second she achieves an elegiac effect by the use of anapaests:

O weep for them, sad Spanish ladies,  
Nevermore will he come through the garden  
To kiss your bright mouths in the darkness,  
To star all the night time with roses  
To scent all the night time with kisses.

In her poems of a more intimate and personal kind, she uses flat, colloquial rhythms, but without transmuting them into poetry: these poems are commonplace and monotonous. I can see no psychological subtlety in such a poem as "Waiting in the Street" to compensate for its lack of verbal beauty:

I'll go home and wait.  
I can't think what's become of you.  
I can't think. . . .  
My head does ache.  
I can't think of anything but you.  
I wonder what it feels like to go mad?  
I wish you'd come.

The war poems (1914-18) at the end of the book are among the least successful. However laudable their sentiments of pity and anger may be, they are not a substitute for poetry. The mood is one of savage bitterness but it gives rise only to a sort of hysterical inarticulateness. Thus one poem ends with:

I can't see anything but red.  
O God. The whole thing's rotten, rotten, rotten.

and another:

O Christ, his eyes, his eyes! . . .

Altogether one is forced to the conclusion that Janet Beaton is at her best in poems into which strong personal emotion does not enter at all, or at any rate is firmly controlled, as in the charming poem "The Aspen Trees in Autumn", which begins as a descriptive piece but ends on a personal note:

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O dying leaves, loveliest in your decaying  
 Would that I too might perish and fade in a spendthrift glory of gold,  
 In a wind-blown glory of gold.

Norma Davis's *Earth Cry* has, in my opinion, met with excessive praise, though as a first volume it certainly deserves attention. Miss Davis is essentially a poet of the Tasmanian landscape, its trees and flowers, its birds and animals. She is haunted by its sounds and sights and odours, and is fond of blending them in a "synaesthetic" image, as in

the garden's joyous shouts  
 Of stabbing colour,

or

I have sipped  
 The nectar magpies spilled across the morn.

but she is no detached observer; nature arouses strong emotions in her and is in turn made to share her moods. This sense of kinship with Nature, a legacy of the Georgians, is no doubt instinctive in Miss Davis, but her expression of it sometimes seems to me pretentious:

Rose-tinted in their pride,  
 Flesh of my flesh, the hills rise, and my blood  
 Burns in the waratah on the mountain side.

And though a lyric poet is by nature an egotist, the constant "I" of many of these poems becomes monotonous.

There is no denying that Miss Davis has a remarkable facility in the use of language, and sometimes a genuine felicity. She thinks instinctively in images, and in some of her descriptive phrases she can paint a vivid picture in a few words, as in

Flat boatmen beetles rowing rhythmically  
 With tiny elfin oars;

and

Pansy-purple the marsh now, where the lonely  
 Bittern sips the gold of the drowning moon.

But on the whole her facility is at present dangerous; her pen flows faster than her thoughts, and she is guilty of many tame or vague or even silly phrases, such as

the warm earth's dark deliciousness

and

starlight smooths my dress with misty hands

and (in a poor poem on France)

The once warm mouth that curved exquisitely  
 Shows dully purple in a ghastly bruise.

She piles image on image, sometimes spoiling her original effect; and in her descriptive poems epithets erupt like measles. On the rare occasions when she strips her style of adjectives, as in "Prelude to Storm", the improvement is noticeable. Another unfortunate feature of her style is her liking for archaic diction: in one passage of six lines, for instance, occur "fay", "'neath", "don", "quest" (as a verb), "glee". And like most facile writers, she can rest content with a weak phrase for the sake of rhyme instead of persevering until the demands of sense and sound are equally satisfied: thus in one poem "Farm Morning" we find the clumsy periphrasis "her that gave them birth" and the inept description "an egg of dazzling pearl".

If one notices in Miss Davis's work the absence of any firm structure of thought, there is no lack of emotion. The trouble is that her emotions, like her

adjectives, gush out too readily, with an effect sometimes of artistic insincerity, which is of course an entirely different thing from personal insincerity; it is the sort of thing one finds in some hymns and in most of the verse written for women's magazines. As an example of what I mean take the poem "Buds", which begins

How beautiful are buds

and ends

my soul is humbled by a breaking bud.

(The resemblance to the popular ballad "Trees" is devastating.) And lest it be thought that I have pounced on a single bad example, I shall add a reference to the magpies who

having eaten never once forget

To offer up their thanks in song to God,

to the sloppy poem "Woman" and the still sloppier "Plea":

This I plead,

Beloved, cradle me and hold me softly

As though I were a little drowsy child;

And sing me those old magic lullabies

Of fairies dancing frailly 'neath the moon,

Of fabled birds and green-eyed goblins laughing,

And children seeking for the treasure lying

In radiant wonder at the rainbow's foot;

And I shall fall asleep, and sleeping love you

Because the dreams I dream are beautiful!

When I met this poem on page 4 I wondered in amazement whether Miss Davis was not capable of anything better. To be fair, she certainly is, but her work is so uneven at present that very few of her poems could not be improved by revision, and some would have been better omitted altogether. Like Janet Beaton, she is best in her most objective poems. There are several excellent poems of pure description: "Tussocks Lands", for instance, and "Autumn", in which the coming of autumn is described throughout in military imagery—a feat of sustained virtuosity which is also an admirable piece of scene-painting. Best of all I liked "October Harvest", with its picture of lazy opulence:

No meagre harvest this, when headlands burn

With crocus gold of gorse like tasselled rye;

Where bees, those thrifty gleaners, oft return

To garner sweets that left would drift and lie;

No frugal harvest this, where white box-trees

Are snowed with oaten dust of powdered meal,

And corn of wild grass fingers the soft knees

Of new-born lambs whose reed-thin voices peal

Forlorn and lonely on the sharp sweet air.

Miss Davis undoubtedly has talent; her poetic future depends on whether she imposes a stern discipline on herself and conquers her besetting faults or prefers to follow the primrose path of cheap sentiment and lush diction.

Rosemary Dobson's *In a Convex Mirror* is another first volume by a young poet, but Miss Dobson has already acquired that sense of artistic discipline which Miss Davis at present lacks. She is still of course learning her craft, so it is not surprising to find echoes of other poets in her work: of Hopkins in "Moving in Mist" ("Look close at the wavering, stayed now, coralline branches"), of Eliot in "In a Café", with its deliberately casual style and abrupt interpolations, of Auden in "Australian Holiday, 1940". The result is that her work is not perfectly integrated, and at times her own personality is submerged by these

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outside influences; nevertheless from her work as a whole I do get the impression of a more distinctive poetic personality than from either of the two writers previously discussed.

Her interest in the technical side of her work can be seen in her experiments with rhythmic and verbal effects, with alliteration (in "The Fire" and "Moving in Mist") and assonance (in "The Rider"). At its best her style is both concise and precise; and very rarely is she content with the easy and obvious. In the last stanza of "Young Girl at a Window", for example, she achieves something of the chiselled grace of the classical epigram:

Over the gently-turning hills  
Travel a journey with your eyes  
In forward footsteps, chance assault—  
This way the map of living lies.  
And this the journey you must go  
Through grass and sheaves and, lastly, snow.

This is but one example of the exquisite music which Miss Dobson can produce from conventional metres. The title-piece "In a Convex Mirror" is perhaps an even better example; here, too, she makes skilful use of historical associations to deepen the sense of mortality, mingling past and present so that Rostov unites with Babylon as a symbol of transience.

But Miss Dobson's work is not merely technically interesting; what she says is interesting, too. I don't think, however, that her most "modern" pieces are her best; it is in these that she is least herself and most an echo of the ideas and mannerisms of her contemporaries. "One Section", for instance, is a rather forced mixture of realism and symbolism, and "Australian Holiday, 1940" contributes less to the reader's poetic experience than many shorter and less ambitious pieces. It may be aptly contrasted with the little poem "The Tempest", in which Miss Dobson deliberately evokes memories of a familiar masterpiece in order to create something new and beautiful of her own.

Unlike Janet Beaton and Norma Davis, Rosemary Dobson, in her more personal poems, always keeps her emotions under control; but I think that perhaps she, like Miss Davis, is at her best in descriptive work. There is a striking pictorial quality in "Foreshore" and "Cockerel Sun", a bravura piece in which a fanciful image is brilliantly elaborated. The finest example, however, and in my opinion the best descriptive poem in all three volumes, is "Apex". In this description of a grey crane the pictorial and musical qualities of Miss Dobson's style are most perfectly blended. I cannot resist quoting the second half of the poem:

But here among the lilies lurks there not  
Suspect of slime in green translucency?  
His long neck arches questioning—arrests; for there  
Darts through the silence, bubbling water up,  
The anxious beetle, impudent to disturb  
Ancient solemnity of peace—his leg falls limp.

Perplexed and shattered silence builds again  
Her antique towers among the water-lilies.

THELMA HERRING.

## DUSTY ANSWER

*Ode of Our Times.* By Frederick T. Macartney. (The Anvil Press, Melbourne, 1944.)

The Australian topical ode may be regarded as the creation of the late "Furnley Maurice". Mr. Macartney obviously follows the *Melbourne Odes*, though with the individual technique developed in his own long experience as a poet. The note of his ode is struck in the line:

The old wisdom falters; what is the voice of youth?

Youth is allowed to state its case for "the subconscious", communism and mechanism, ending half-uncertainly, half-exultantly with:

Surely you,  
you who were young,  
know all this is true!  
You grope in life's blackout for form,  
but we are what light it can throw.  
If we are but foam of a storm,  
we are foam at the prow!

Speaking with the voice of maturity and disillusionment, the poet answers:

Seek you a revelation? There is none but this  
Immediate bliss.  
Whether with desperate hands you supplicate  
The noon or the cold fame of the stars,  
Or numbed in folded postures you await  
The preparation of new avatars . . .  
Renounce the far importance for release  
In glad perceptive peace—

which is all very well for age! Mr. Macartney is confident that "This meets the plight of our encumbered days", and predicts an end which is nothing more than "mere settling of mere agitated dust". But at least there is some satisfaction in agitation, however useless! Mr. Macartney's philosophy of quietism will surely not have a wide appeal.

R.G.H.

## MRS. CHISHOLM

*Caroline Chisholm.* By George Landen Dann. (Mulga Publications. Sydney. 1943.)

Under the title of *A Second Moses*, Mr. Dann's play was performed by the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society in 1939. That title (which can well be spared) was suggested by a rhyme in *Punch* in 1845, describing Mrs. Chisholm, the great pioneer of female immigration in N.S.W., as "a second Moses, in bonnet and in shawl". Her work has been recognised in a number of memoirs and studies, but Mr. Dann is the first to present her character in dramatic form.

The whole play, indeed, depends on this portrayal. It contains very little quickened action, the crisis, apparently, being the moment when, believing her work done, Mrs. Chisholm is about to leave the colony and a "sign" comes to her that she is to remain. Mr. Dann obtains his effects from the force of that strong character in operation. She beards Governor Gipps, she conquers recalcitrance among the girls in her charge, she surmounts all human and material difficulties. Quietly and gracefully written, the play has truer merit than a more sensational piece on the theme would have possessed, and the author is to be congratulated on his understanding realisation of his subject.

R.G.H.

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### PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

*Australian Poetry, 1943.* Selected by H. M. Green. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. Sydney, 1944. 3s. 6d.)

*One Hundred Poems.* By Kenneth Slessor. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 5s.)

*"The Fire on the Snow" and "The Golden Lover": Two Plays for Radio.* By Douglas Stewart. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 5s.)

*The Moonlit Doorway: Poems.* By Kenneth MacKenzie. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 5s.)

*Spright and Geist.* By R.G.H. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 2s. 6d.)

*Poetry: The Quarterly of Australasian Verse.* Edited by Flexmore Hudson. Number 13. (Editor, Lucindale, S.A. 2s.)

*Joseph Furphy: The Legend of a Man and his Book.* By Miles Franklin, in association with Kate Baker. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 10s. 6d.)

*"A Girl with Red Hair" and Other Stories.* By Douglas Stewart. (Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. 7s. 6d.)

*Winnowed Verses.* By Henry Lawson. *It's Harder for Girls.* By Gavin Casey. *Man-Shy.* By Frank Dalby Davison. *Call to the Winds.* By P. G. Taylor. *Dig.* By Frank Clune. *Insect Wonders of Australia.* By Keith C. McKeown. (Australian Pocket Library. Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1944. Various prices under 2s.)

*Poets at War: An Anthology of Verse by Australian Servicemen,* compiled by Ian Mudie. (A Jindyworobak Publication. Georgian House, Melbourne. 1944. 6s. 6d.)

*Crescendo,* edited by James Franklin Lewis, Missouri, U.S.A. Vol. III, Special Final Issue, Autumn, 1944.

*Barjai: A Meeting Place for Youth,* edited by Laurence Collinson and Barrie G. Reid, Number 17, November-December, 1944.

*Between You and Me,* by J. McC. (Current Book Distributors, Sydney. 1944. 1s.)

*Australia in New Guinea,* by E. A. H. Laurie. (Current Book Distributors, Sydney. 1944. 3d.)

*World Review: The Quarterly Journal of the Tasmanian League of Nations Union,* December, 1944. 9d.

### NOTE

"*Southerly*", Number Three, 1944, Correction.—Page 1, List of Contents: "Let's Talk of Graves—of Worms . . .", omit "—of Worms" (uncaught).

## AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

*Presentation to the Honorary Secretary*

At the suggestion of some members of the Executive Committee, a fund was opened in August of last year for recognising the services of Mr. H. M. Butterley to the Association. The ready response to the appeal is perhaps the surest indication of the esteem in which Mr. Butterley is held. The Executive Committee wishes to thank all members who answered the appeal and made the presentation possible. On the very appropriate occasion of the twenty-first anniversary dinner of the Association, the Chairman, Dr. A. G. Mitchell, handed to Mr. Butterley, on behalf of members, a wallet containing a cheque for £33. In making the presentation he said:

During its twenty-one years of activity the Association has had the interest and support of men eminent in literature and scholarship in this country. One thinks of, among others, Professor Brereton, his successor, Professor Waldo, and particularly Professor Holme. He was the first founder and organiser of the Association. He has already spoken of the way in which the name of Sir Mungo MacCallum is linked with the inauguration and development of the Association. On the death of Sir Mungo it was the hope of the members that Professor Holme would agree to succeed him in the office of Life President. He declined the office because he wished that the title of Life President should be enjoyed by MacCallum alone. Regretfully the Executive Committee accepted his decision while honouring him for the motive that prompted it. It is specially appropriate that he should be presiding at the twenty-first anniversary dinner, so signally honoured by the presence of His Excellency, the Governor. The Association has also been well and faithfully served by many who have held responsible office in it, for example, Mr. Berman, for a long time its treasurer, and even now a tireless worker as business manager; Mr. McLoskey, Chairman of the Executive Committee during two of the most difficult years of its career; Mr. Howarth, the editor of *Southerly*; Miss Earle Hooper who has recently resigned from the committee after many years of service. But no one, perhaps, has laid us under a greater debt of gratitude than has Mr. Butterley. He has been secretary of the Association for no less than fourteen of its twenty-one years of life. Whenever the business of electing the secretary for the coming year has come round, members have been thinking not so much whom they should elect, as how they might most effectively talk Mr. Butterley down if he showed the least sign of asking for relief from the office. Once or twice, as I remember, he has begun to make the request but he has never been allowed to finish the necessary form of words. The office of secretary calls for a good deal more than industry, patience and thoroughness in handling many routine matters. It requires tact and courtesy. We have always known that no one would be offended and that we should always have the goodwill of those with whom we were dealing while Mr. Butterley spoke for the Association. It is now my very pleasant duty to ask Mr. Butterley to accept this wallet as a token of gratitude and esteem from members of the Association.

T.G.H.

